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THE POLICE MINISTER

BY J. S. BORLASE

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THE POLICE MINISTER.

THE POLICE MINISTER:

A Tale of St. Petersburg.

BY

JAMES SKIPP BORLASE.

Author of "Daring Deeds and Tales of Peril and Adventure."

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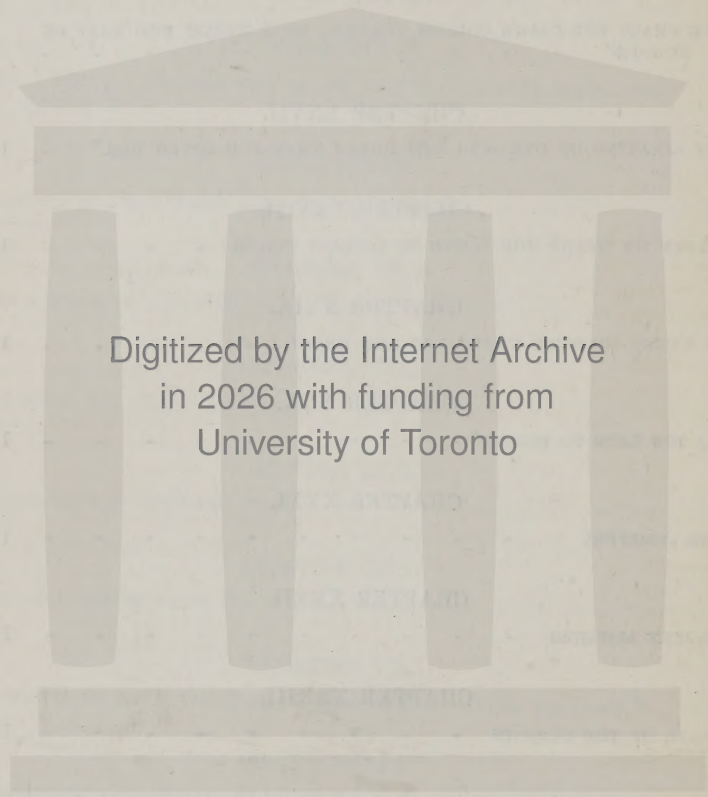

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THE POLICE MINISTER.

CHAPTER I.

"I AM ONE OF THE VERY FEW WHO CAN DEFY EVEN THE SECRET POLICE."

The pit of the great Opera House at St. Petersburg is boarded over, and five thousand of the *élite* of the Russian capital have met thereon, "to chase the glowing hours with flying feet."

Without, the City of the Czar is locked in its five months' belt of ice, the snow lies deep, there are but four hours of daylight between the rising and the setting of the pale, rayless, heatless winter's sun, and from a hundred different quarters of the metropolis the cry of famine rises to the aurora quivering heavens.

Yet there, in this one building, is assembled wealth sufficient to rescue from the death-pit tens of thousands of starving families, were but the diamonds, the emeralds and the opals that glitter on white arms and whiter bosoms, and the bullion lace, the seed pearls and the garnets that flash on uniforms (some of which have cost more than would suffice to clothe an entire regiment of British cavalry), turned into honest coin of the realm, and disbursed in warm blankets and nourishing food.

But let us not look without, where the thermometer is so many degrees below freezing point, when within is light and warmth and luxury.

Why, the very orchestra (wherein the band of the Volhynian Guard, a hundred and fifty strong, discourses such music as could be heard in no other capital in Europe) is an orange grove, and every corridor and robing room and vestibule is a separate tropical paradise, where the perfume of exotic flowers is mingled with spray from ess-bouquet and wood-violet fountains, and wherein canary birds that have cost four guineas a-piece warble within aviaries of golden wire.

Princes of the blood are there, and Grand Dukes and Marshals of the Empire, glittering with military orders.

There, too, are the Ambassadors of well-nigh every nation in Europe, attended by their *attachés*.

The dancing had continued for some hours, and the time had arrived at which it was most usual for his Majesty the Emperor to make his appearance, when the attention of everyone was attracted by the unusual vision of a gentleman arrayed in sombre evening dress, and leaning on his arm a beautiful girl of some eighteen years of age, whose golden hair and the delicate pink and white of whose complexion de-

clared most unmistakably that she was English.

What other nation but our own could produce so exquisite a face and form, arms so rounded and fair, shoulders so plump and dimpled, and a chest so snowily white that the pearl necklet that lay thereon looked actually yellow by comparison.

"Sir Harry Gordon, your countrywomen make up wondrously well," exclaimed the beautiful Princess Olga to the young *attaché* of the British Embassy, with whom she was dancing.

The Princess Olga was twenty-one, an orphan, her own mistress, and the reputed possessor of an immense fortune. But she was an inveterate gambler, scattered gold broadcast in the gratification of any particular whim, and was addicted to coquetry and jealousy.

"Surely your highness does not imagine that young girl to be made up in any way?" retorted the English officer. "I assure you, on my honour, that she owes not a single charm to art."

"I am willing to believe that her hair and her eyes are her own, which proves the immense extent of my good-nature; but that the exquisite whiteness and clearness of her skin are not due to some wondrous cosmetique I will not credit."

"I assure your highness—nay, I would stake my life on it, that the strongest cosmetique she has ever used has been soft water," exclaimed Sir Harry Gordon, rather warmly. "England's daughters are famed for the softness and whiteness of their skins, and the full beauty of their forms, just as the Russian ladies are famed for the smallness of their feet and hands, their animation, grace and wit."

"Beauties and accomplishments which they should have sense enough to bestow on their countrymen, who alone can be expected to appreciate them at their proper value," replied the Princess, biting her full red under lip. "Ha, the music has ceased, the dance is over. Your fair countrywoman must be longing for a younger cavalier than her father, I should think, so I dismiss you from my service in order that you may enter hers."

"But, your highness, pray consider," began Sir Harry.

"Highnesses are not given to consider, and when princesses command they expect their subjects to obey. On second thoughts, however, you may lead me as far as the card-room. The click of the roulette ball is sweeter music to me than any that the band can discourse," and her arm was again passed within his.

He did not feel it tremble, he did not notice the scintillation of the diamonds as her bosom rose and fell, he did not perceive the flush on her cheeks, or the angry light that had newly come into her deep, unfathomable, yet wholly beautiful, violet eyes; he never guessed, did that handsome, stolid young Englishman, that the impulsive Princess loved him; with a love, moreover, that would delight in digging a pitfall deep and dark for any rival who dared supplant her in the heart wherein she had once deigned to reign.

The Princess was a woman, or rather a girl, who compelled coquetry from her male acquaintances by herself first throwing down the ball.

Sir Harry Gordon had been accustomed of late to attend her re-unions, for the reason that other fashionable young men did the same.

But, though favoured with much of the volatile Princess' attention on such occasions, as indubitably the handsomest cavalier present, he never for an instant imagined that

she had lost her heart to him, far less that she expected his own in exchange; for he had come but lately from a country where modest women are supposed to keep their hearts carefully locked up within their own bosoms until they are with some eagerness sought and prayed for.

Thus it was that Sir Harry Gordon, the young English *attaché*, left the Princess Olga within the precincts of the cardroom, sincerely pitying her degraded passion for gambling; and returning through a flower decked corridor to the theatre, sought out, with a heart now beginning to throb more violently than was its wont, the lovely girl who had been the subject of the Princess' obloquy.

"Ada!" "Harry!" was the mutual greeting when they met, and for nearly a minute they stood gazing into each other's faces, hand clasped in hand, utterly unconscious of what was passing around.

"Ada Bayard, what, in heaven's name, brings you to Russia?" then exclaimed Sir Harry, in a low, anxious tone; "why, it is but six weeks ago that I supped with you at your aunt's in Fulham."

"A week from which time, hearing that my dear father was failing in health and strength, I resolved, unsolicited, to come to Russia to keep house for him and nurse him. Aunt Ruth was strongly opposed to the measure, but I carried my point, as I generally do."

"And so that old gentleman on whose arm I saw you leaning as you entered the theatre is your father?"

"Yes, but he would not be flattered at your calling him an old gentleman, for he is but very little over forty."

"What? and with his hair so white and his step so feeble?"

"He has been made old by one great grief—one great horror. What it was I know not, for he has never told me, but it had something to do with the death of my dear mother, and with my being sent to England. Oh, how many times has he not longed to return to England himself, but the Czar will not let him! Often has the petition been made, but it is ever refused."

"But by what right, human or divine, *dare* the Czar detain him?"

"Because many years ago, to secure great temporary advantages, my father consented to become naturalised as a Russian subject. That is the reason, Harry."

"It was a very foolish step, Ada."

"It was, indeed, for, although now almost a millionaire as regards wealth, yet is he in another sense little better than a slave. Were he by a mere mischance to lose the Czar's favour he might be knouted, or sent to Siberia, at an hour's notice. 'Tis this thought that is breaking his heart, 'tis this knowledge that is digging his grave; and yet it is but a phantom fear after all, for the Emperor loves him and is wont to call him the Father of his Navy, a tribute he has well deserved."

"Then your father is Mr. Bayard, the great ship builder? You must introduce me to him, Ada. I want to ask him to give you to me for a wife—that is, if you will have me?"

"Alas! Harry, since our last pleasant ramble beside the Thames I have resolved to give myself entirely to my parent. I am his sole stay. He has not a real friend in all St. Petersburg. He hates the Russians, and—"

"My pretty little friend with the skin of snow, the first lesson to be learnt in Russia is that speech is given us not to express our thoughts but to conceal them," said a stout,

matronly looking lady, as she patted one of Ada's glossy shoulders warningly.

Then, approaching her lips close to her ear, she added, in a whisper, "For heaven's sake be more cautious, my dear. Golgorouki, the head of the Secret Police, has been drinking in your words for the past five minutes, and his mental notes will to-morrow be committed to his books, wherein you will be marked 'dangerous.' I would not dare to give you this warning were I other than what I am; but I am one of the very few who can defy even the Secret Police."

And with a light, silvery, mocking laugh the lady passed on—a vision of silks, velvets, old lace and flashing diamonds.

"Ada," said Sir Harry Gordon then, "I begin to feel that this country is all that I have read of it. Let us leave the glittering but hollow crowd, and seek some quiet and secluded nook where heart can speak to heart and eye to eye without any princely detective being at hand to take notes."

CHAPTER II.

THREE RAPID REPORTS FROM A REVOLVER SOUNDED.

A BEAUTIFUL little retreat was soon found in one of the boxes of the grand circle.

It was as large as a small room, and was hung all round with white satin drapery, whereon the two headed Russian eagle was wrought all over in gold.

"There, Ada," said he, "now we are as much alone as though we were shipwrecked on a desert isle, and yet we have the advantage of looking down upon one of the most brilliant assemblages that the whole world could produce. Let us, then, feast our eyes and talk at the same time, for the sharp ears of Messieurs the Police will not avail them, if we converse in an undertone."

But this assertion proved Sir Harry to be more short sighted than it becomes an Englishman staying in Russia to be, for, at that very instant, a tall, saturnine expressioned man, with a face as white as the enamelled one of a watch, and hair, eyebrows, and upward pointed moustaches as black as the Roman numerals that are painted thereon, his well knit form arrayed in a handsome uniform, and his cocked hat tucked under his arm, entered the adjoining box as lightly as though his patent leather Hessians had been shod with gutta-percha, closed the door behind him, drew a cork screw from his pocket, bored it into a seeming knot in the thin partition wall between the two boxes, drew forth a plug the size of a crown-piece, gently moved a chair up to the spot, and seated himself therein with his ear to the orifice.

"You can't think," Ada was saying to Sir Harry, "how rejoiced I was to see you to-night. I don't know why my father brought me to this place. Sure am I that he did so much against his will, but the invitation was for us both, and it

was as though he did not dare to decline it."

"And from whom did the invitation come, the Czar?"

"Indirectly it may have been so, but officially all such invitations, when sent to aliens and strangers, are issued from the Police Bureau, *Section des Etrangers.*"

"But your father, you say, is a naturalised Russian subject?"

"Yes, but I am not, and there lies the difference."

"Thank God that you are not, dear Ada. For heaven's sake let nothing tempt you to become one. This is a land where ultra-civilization and ultra-barbarism walk hand-in-hand. Look down at that bright and apparently happy assemblage, yet the fairest girl there on leaving the Opera House might find that she was on her way to the mines of Siberia instead of returning to her mother's arms."

"Harry, my father was telling me an awful history only yesternight. It was of a lady, young and beautiful, who, forty-five years ago, at one of these brilliant assemblages, was beckoned into an anteroom at the close of a waltz, to be gagged and hurried away to the Police Bureau. There, without being accused of any crime, or even allowed to speak, she was divested of her ball dress and her diamonds, arrayed in a peasant's garb of the very coarsest materials, and, without being permitted to see a single relative or friend, was at once sent off on her 3,000 miles' journey to Siberia. After labouring there in the mines for thirty-five years, she was brought back to St. Petersburg in the same secret and mysterious manner, and in the same room of the same Police Bureau her penitential garb was taken off and she was re-arrayed in the rich and costly jewels that had once set off her lustrous youth, but now mocked her prematurely grim and wrinkled age. The transformation completed, she was turned out of doors to wander where she listed, and that was to end her life and her troubles in the cold embrace of the Neva, for all whom she had loved were dead, and no one even recollected her."

"I read of her sad case in the London papers," said Sir Harry, with a shudder; "but I set it down to be a mere penny a liner. So your father knows it to be true?"

"Alas! yes. He had the narrative from her own lips during the brief hour that our roof afforded the poor lady shelter. I am sure she might have stayed there days, weeks, and even months, had she felt so inclined; but her grief and her desolation were too great for her to bear, and so she preferred the river. May God have mercy on her poor soul."

"Amen," answered Sir Harry, solemnly; and then he added, "who can wonder at such a land producing Nihilists? Such a government should be swept from the earth's face."

"And were I Russian born, and a man, I would help so to sweep it," replied Ada Bayard, her bosom heaving with a generous excitement and sympathy for the down trodden people of the mighty land in which she was but a sojourner.

"Ay," she added, "I fancy that I could nerve myself to do great things, and if I firmly believed that the death of one tyrant would make millions free and happy, I do not say but I would dare to emulate the heroic action of Charlotte Corday, and fire a revolver at even an emperor's breast."

"Ha, ha, ha! For those words thou art Prince Golgorouki's," muttered the police agent in the adjoining box to himself; and then he chuckled afresh and rubbed his

hands together, as he added, "in any case there's a thousand silver roubles in Ivan Reyloff's pouch for the telling, and the crime that he must either commit or fall by secret daggers is shifted from his own shoulders to whiter and fairer ones."

"I do not believe that the Emperor is at all to blame," Sir Harry Gordon was meanwhile saying. "He is a most excellently intentioned monarch. See how earnestly he desires to release all the serfs, see how—by Heaven, you may see himself. Talk of a certain gentleman, and he is wont to show his horns, you know, and there is the Czar of all the Russias just entering the Opera House, surrounded by a brilliant staff."

It was indeed the Emperor, the Great Red Sun of Russia, as the loyal peasants were wont to affectionately term him, and as he strode up the entire length of the theatre, attended by about a dozen magnificently clad cavaliers, the brilliant crowd parted to right and left, leaving a broad avenue for him to traverse, whilst the band of the Volhynian Guards struck up the National Anthem *Borshoe zara Brangie* (God protect the Czar), and every head was bowed.

"Well, he looks a good man. 'Tis the first time I have seen him," remarked Ada Bayard. But hardly had the words escaped her lips when three rapid reports from a revolver sounded close by, and were followed by a scene of the most unexampled consternation and confusion.

Almost ere it had attained its height Sir Harry Gordon had dashed out of the box and collared the man whom he detected sneaking forth from the adjoining one.

The next instant, however, a stab in the back caused him to relinquish his hold, and the ruffian glided away.

Sir Harry pursued him through the corridor, down the grand staircase, and into the body of the house, where he fell to the floor, whilst, pointing with the last effort of his strength towards the retreating figure that by this time had mingled with the crowd; but unable to utter a word.

Ada Bayard meanwhile knew not why her companion had quitted the box so suddenly, and she had begun to feel alarmed at his prolonged absence, when the door opened and her father walked hurriedly in.

"Come, Ada," said he, "we had better get home at once, for all the fun is over for the night. His Majesty is most providentially uninjured, but, I am sorry to say, they have failed to discover the assassin. In the horror and confusion, no one seems to have noticed from what direction the shots came. Alas! they were mischievous enough, though they failed to find their destined billet, for one lovely girl was shot dead, and I hear that a very promising young officer also is wounded seriously. Come, Ada, we do not know how many more murderers there may be in the Opera House, and I tremble for your safety. A cordon of police is drawn around the theatre, but that they will let *me* pass I have no doubt."

Then the beautiful young girl taking the prematurely old man by the arm, they quitted the sumptuous box together, she first drawing a swans'-down lined opera cloak over the creamy back and the plump white shoulders, above which the cruel knout now hung suspended by a single hair; for within that very box, on the floor between the rich satin hangings and the wainscoting, all unknown to both father and child, lay a small revolver, a delicate but deadly toy, that might have been carried in a waistcoat pocket.

He who had discharged it had had time to thrust it through the hole in the wainscoting ere he replaced the plug, which fitted the orifice so exactly as to be almost undiscoverable; and there the weapon was, a mute witness, when found, against those who had occupied that box, at the time of the attempted, but happily frustrated, assassination of the Czar.

The shipbuilder's sleigh stood, amidst a thousand others, in the great courtyard of the Opera House.

He handed his beautiful child in, wrapped her up in soft bearskin rugs, and then sprang in beside her.

The ischvostchik, or driver, whipped up the two fine black horses, with the solid silver harness, and passing the police cordon by the mere mention of their names, away they sped over the snow as smoothly and unjoltingly as a ship rides the foaming billows; the way revealed by millions of earthen pots, filled with train oil and furnished with wicks of tow, that, placed equidistantly and at short intervals from each other, marked the lines of the streets for miles, producing a most curious and ghastly effect.

It was easy to imagine one's self gliding along the roofs of a city of the dead that was illumined by corpse candles, and some such idea did seize upon Ada, causing her to shrink closer to her father's side.

CHAPTER III.

"I AM BOTH PRINCESS AND POLICE SPY."

In England it would have been twelve o'clock at noon; but in St. Petersburg the sun is only just rising to dissipate the darkness of the twenty hours' night.

Introduce we the reader to the interior of the palace of the Princess Olga, and first of all to an ante-chamber therein.

It is a bare, uncarpeted room, and not over clean, but the windows have double frames to keep out the cold, and a big fire roars in the stove, around which half a dozen female servants are seated, drinking tea and constantly replenishing their cups from the great brass samovar.

"Our lady condescends to sleep soundly this morning," remarks one, as she squeezes a few drops of lemon juice into her tea.

"Yes, but be sure to have her coffee ready the instant she rings, that she may deign to moisten her lips," said another.

"But no one makes her coffee so nicely as did Katinka. It was a great misfortune for her highness that one who made coffee so sweetly should have caught the fever and died."

"She would not have caught the fever had not her highness sent her to the police barracks to be flogged for giving her a handkerchief perfumed with frangipani instead of ess-bouquet. There's no knowing what one may catch at such places; and besides, the punishment was brutal for such an offence."

"Hush, Baba, hush," said the oldest of the party; "we shall think you a Nihilist if you chatter such nonsense. 'Tis only the lazy ones who don't beat us. Know you not the good old Russian proverb, minion: 'A maid who has been well beaten is worth two maids whose backs are unscored?' Her highness is condescending enough to house and feed us; so what more can we want?"

"A bird is well enough in a golden cage, but he is better on the green branch," muttered Baba, half apologetically, and at that instant the ringing of a bell checked further conversation.

Lota, the youngest and the prettiest of the assemblage, whipped up the silver tray, already laid with an exquisite Sévres breakfast service, to which a dainty coffee pot was quickly added, and away she hurried to her mistress' bedroom.

Let us enter with her and share her dismay at beholding the Princess Olga, not reclining at full length in her bed of down, with her beautiful black hair rippling, as was its wont, over the costly lace pillow, but sitting, half-dressed, in a luxurious easy chair, with a wild, defiant look in her large violet eyes, and a face pale almost to ghastliness.

"Your highness, my queen, my empress!" gasped Lota; "is it possible that you could have rung before, and that I failed to hear? Oh, do not have me whipped, for indeed it was not my fault!"

"Lota, do not talk nonsense. Kneel down and button up my boots," snapped out the beautiful Princess, viciously.

The girl, in her hurry and anxiety to oblige her, placed the breakfast equipage on an exquisite malachite-topped table, but, in her excessive nervousness, too near to the edge thereof.

The consequence was that the table turned over, the Sévres service went rolling all over the floor, and the silver coffee pot deposited its entire contents in the Princess' lap. It is very unlikely that she was scalded, for the blue satin *robe de chambre* that she wore was thickly quilted, but Lota had it off her in a trice, and before hardly a drop of the liquid could soak through.

If the exquisite form of the Princess did not quiver with pain, it most assuredly did with rage, however, and, seizing Lota by the hair with one hand, she picked up a tiny red morocco slipper from off the floor with the other, and with the high heel thereof commenced to belabour her still kneeling victim across the head, shoulders, and even face as hard as she could strike.

When she had thoroughly tired herself out, but not before, she threw down the dainty instrument of torture, and, sinking languidly back in her chair, exclaimed, waspishly—

"There, I vow that you have quite put me out of breath, you little pig. Leave the room and send me in Baba."

So exit Lota, sobbing, and with her face covered with blood, and a minute later enter Baba, pale but untrembling.

"Baba," said the Princess, "dress me, and tenderly, mind, not as though I was made of such coarse common clay as yourself. It has always seemed to me that your knuckles are the boniest of any living creature's. Do not let me feel them as you button up my boots or fasten my dress, or your back shall smart."

"No, your highness," was all that Baba replied, and then she set cautiously to work, for she had no wish to be made such a spectacle of as poor Lota had just been.

"Baba," said the Princess, presently, with a harsh, jerky little laugh, "would you cry your heart out were you to learn that your dear, kind, indulgent mistress was ruined, eh?"

"I hope that I should feel very sorry, your highness."

"You hope; you are not sure, then, that you should? Am I to understand you in that way, ungrateful slave?"

"Believe me that I am not ungrateful, your highness, for any kindness or favours that you may have shown me, and it would be a dreadful thing for one so young and lovely to be ruined."

"Then, people with hearts should cry at dreadful things; for I tell you that I *am* ruined, Baba. Last night I was fool enough to gamble away all that I possessed — houses, lands, horses, carriages, ay, and you and all my other servants as well. I hardly know whether I did not gamble my own self away in the end, for I was mad, and was made mad, Baba, by a pig of an Englishman daring to think one of his pink and white complexioned countrywomen more beautiful than I."

"Surely, your highness, no Englishman was rude enough to say so?"

"No, but he implied it both by words and by actions. He left me for her and remained with her the whole evening, ay, up to the moment when the Czar was fired at. I wish I could fasten *that* crime upon them. Baba, I would sell my soul to Satan could I but see that lily white en-

chantress bound to a post in a police yard, and a couple of burly sergeants cutting her dainty flesh to ribbons with the knout, whilst he was compelled to look silently on, grief and rage devouring his very heart strings the while," gasped the Princess.

"Your highness," said Baba, "the knout is only for the Russian born, not for the stranger. Even the very Czar would not dare—"

"But, Baba, this girl, whom I hate, has a naturalised Russian for a father, and if her mother was the same, or if she was but born after either of her parents became so, she is amenable to the laws of Russia. I will find all this out, and, if matters are as I hope, the hatred of even a beggared princess shall dig a pit deep enough for Ada Bayard to fall into and perish."

"Ada Bayard, said you? Oh, my poor murdered mistress!" wailed forth the serf Baba, interrupting the Princess.

A look of intense horror came into her eyes, and, throwing up her arms, with a low moan she sank to the floor, insensible.

There is no knowing what the Princess Olga might not have done to bring her handmaid back to reason, though it may readily be imagined that the means employed would not have been very gentle ones, but that at this juncture her bedroom door was softly opened from without, and into the apartment stalked a man, clad in a brilliant uniform, and covered with medals and orders.

"Prince Golgorouki!" exclaimed the Princess Olga, flushing with shame, "this liberty is most unwarrantable."

"Any liberty may be taken with the penniless," replied the head of the Secret Police. "Yesterday I should have stood on etiquette; to-day I throw it aside as only so much humbug. Why, it is not your house that I have entered, but somebody else's."

"Yet a lady's sleeping chamber is always held sacred."

"Not against the police. They have a right to penetrate everywhere. But, pardon me, your highness, I have not time to bandy words with you."

"Have you called upon me only to insult me, Prince?"

"No, on the contrary, I have called upon you to do you a good turn. Is that woman in a swoon or only shamming?"

"It is a real thing, I believe; but what matters it if 'tis not? for a Russian servant dares not bear testimony against her mistress or her mistress' visitors, neither dares a Russian serf, as you are well aware, give evidence against the nobility. Speak on, then, fearlessly."

"I am about to do so. Princess Olga, you are penniless and desperate, yet you are young, and, as some would think, very beautiful."

"Did you come hither only to utter truisms, Prince?"

"Do not interrupt me. You are also fond of intrigue, sharp and cunning to a degree, bold, vindictive, heartless and perfectly unprincipled," continued Golgorouki.

"Ah, I was wrong; I see that you have called to overwhelm me with compliments."

"No, I come to retrieve your fatal past. But for me, you would to-morrow be selling flowers or playbills in front of the Theatre de San Nicalieffe, and we might have to send you to Siberia to escape the public scandal of a princess sunk to pauperism; but the Secret Police of St. Petersburg have long been in need of a puppet such as you, and so you have but to say the word and the Bureau will pay off all your debts and take you into its employ,

allowing you an income of eighty thousand roubles a year. But, remember, you will have to be its creature, its slave, and to denounce, if called upon, your nearest and dearest at its bidding. Come! your answer to my proposals?"

"Will the position you offer me give me power over those whom I secretly hate? Tell me that first!"

"How can it fail to do so, when all sources of official information will be open to you? Serve me well, Princess Olga, and I will be ever ready to gratify your little private piques; that is to say, as long as important interests are not involved thereby."

"And a woman's beauty could not win you over?"

"Not at all. Betray me, and see how much your own will avail you."

"It is enough. Have no fear of my playing *you* false; and, besides, our interests will be bound up together. I accept your offer, Prince Golgorouki, and henceforth I am your tool, your puppet, your slave. I throw truth, honour and integrity to the winds, and I clothe myself with the armour of subtlety, intrigue and deceit. Put me but in the way of wreaking my vengeance upon them I hate, and provide me with but the means of keeping up my accustomed state and dignity, and you will find me capable of anything that the Bureau of Police requires."

"One thing, Princess; you must give up gambling."

"From this moment I will gamble only with human hearts."

"Good. But, secondly, you must never have a lover."

"Lover? Bah, what care I for lovers? Let me but flirt, and that will amply content me. I have done with love; henceforth hate is the one passion of my life. My pride and glory will be that I am both PRINCESS AND POLICE SPY."

CHAPTER IV.

"WAS THIS WOMAN ADA'S MOTHER?"

We need not follow the conversation of Prince Golgorouki and the Princess Olga further, since it went chiefly into the details of the duties that she would have to perform and the manner of performing them.

On the whole, they were simple enough.

Taking advantage of her high rank, which admitted her into the most exclusive circles, she was to pay especial court to the wives and daughters of the various foreign Ambassadors, more especially those of England France, and Austria, in order to worm out of them, in as innocent and artless a manner as possible, the political secrets and probable intentions of their respective governments.

With the same object in view she was to coquette with the young *attachés* of those embassies, *fête* them at her palace, intoxicate them with her beauty, pump them dry of any information that was specially required, and every day duly report progress to the Police Bureau, who, in turn, would report what it deemed expedient to the Czar.

Does the reader imagine we are relating a gross improbability?

Would that we were pulling the long bow altogether; but, alas, in the interests of truth we must declare that the Princess Olga is not a fictitious personage, save in name.

Only a few years ago she was all that we are describing her, and more, namely, the idol of the Russian Court, the bright particular star of every photographer's window in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the reigning toast of all the young men of rank in the Czar's metropolis: whereas now, alive, yet worse than dead, she curses the very hour in which she was born, and no one would dare to own (that is to say, no subject of the Czar) that he retained even her likeness in his possession.

Prince Golgorouki concluded his interview by obtaining from the Princess the exact amount of her embarrassments, which he declared should be liquidated as though the disbursements came from her own hand, that very day, as also that her official salary should commence on the morrow, and be paid monthly in advance.

"That man is an icicle," was Princess Olga's mental soliloquy when he had gone. "Well, I must get dressed. Baba, you beast, your swoon has lasted long enough."

But Baba didn't seem to think so, for she didn't budge.

"The insolent creature, to faint in my very presence, and then not to recover when I require her!" muttered the Princess: and, without more ado, she began to kick the unconscious woman in the ribs, until she at last groaned, and asked, faintly, where she was.

"Where you have no right to indulge in such antics," replied the Princess, sharply. "I will dance on your face if you do not quickly get up."

"Oh, your highness, I am so sorry. I don't know how it happened.

Don't have me punished, this time, I beg."

"Tell me, then, my good Baba, who was this mistress of yours who was murdered? The story will amuse me while you dress me."

Baba's face, into which her naturally ruddy colour had been slowly returning, changed into ghastliness again.

"I never had a mistress who was murdered," she gasped.

"Oh, yes, you had, and she was connected in some way with this Ada Bayard whom I hate. Was she her mother?"

"Your highness deigns to converse with me in riddles, and your slave is, alas! too stupid to solve them."

"Woman, will you madden me with your obstinacy? You fainted with the exclamation on your lips, 'Ada Bayard, said you? Oh, my poor murdered mistress!' Now, those words must mean something."

"I don't know what they mean. I didn't know I said them."

"Mule! I will run my bodkin through your nose."

"I am your highness's serf, to do with what you will."

"Then, as my serf, I command you to answer me. Now, first, as to your former mistress. *Did* you murder her?"

"God forbid, my lady! I loved her far too dearly."

"Ah, so I have drawn the confession from you that you *had* a mistress who was murdered, though you didn't do it. Poor, simple, foolish Baba, you are by no means an arch deceiver. Now next, tell me was this woman Ada Bayard's mother?"

"Your highness, it is an ill-deed to injure those whose bread we have eaten. Do not force me, I entreat of you."

"Injure—injure?" repeated the Princess, thoughtfully, and then her eyes lighted up with triumphant malice as she exclaimed: "Ah, I see, I see: the proving of this murdered woman to be Ada Bayard's mother would injure her, would it? Your words could not apply to the dead, because the dead are past injury. They therefore refer to the living?"

"My murdered mistress was in no way related to the ship-builder's daughter," answered Baba, almost fiercely.

"Very well, my good girl. Was she a foreigner, or a Russian?"

"She was a Russian."

The answer came quite glibly this time.

"You will swear that she was a Russian?" was the Princess Olga's next question, in accents of assumed disappointment.

"I will swear that she was a Russian," answered Baba, triumphantly.

"I believe you, little fool. I do not think that you would swear to a lie. But you have tried to put me off the scent. Come, own it. You thought that, accepting your declaration that your murdered mistress was a Russian, I should at once conclude that she could not be Ada Bayard's mother. But though you avoided a lie you yet fenced with the truth, and by the word Russian you did not mean Russian-born, but that your dead mistress was a naturalised Russian subject. Was it not so?"

"Your highness has so confused me that I know not what I say."

"You seem very ready to swear, though. On yonder table you will find a Bible. Just bring it hither, and swear on it that Ada Bayard is not the daughter of this murdered Russian lady," and the Princess laid great stress on the last two words.

"Oh! your highness, will you not take the word of your poor serf without asking her to kiss the holy book?"

"Let the book lie where it is," laughed the Princess; "your reluctance to swear upon it is quite sufficient answer to my doubts. What an inconvenient commodity is a conscience, if it frequently betrays its possessor as yours has done. So Ada Bayard is wholly a Russian subject, is she? Good; then my hate and my power can speedily crush her. You may go, my good Baba, you may go." And Baba left the room without daring to utter another word.

CHAPTER V.

"THE CHILD TO WHOM YOU REFER DIED OF THE PLAGUE."

THE house of Mr. Bayard, the shipbuilder, was on the English quay (*Ingliskaia Naberenjenaia*).

It was a plain, but large and handsome building, and it was bordered by palaces and villas, and fronted by a fashionable thoroughfare where, in summer, could be seen as many handsome carriages and equipages, as many elegantly dressed ladies with parasols and lap dogs, and as many nursemaids with children in perambulators, as at home in any of the London parks.

Now, however, it is the depth of winter, and the frozen snow lies deep on the granite paving, and beyond it the broad Neva is so thickly coated with ice that an army (artillery, baggage waggons and all) might cross it without any risk of its giving way beneath them.

The sky is dull and grey, and the east wind comes keen and cutting from the great lake of Ladoga, bearing death to all who dare to face it out of doors, unless blessed with a heap of furs or an iron constitution.

Thus it is that only an occasional sleigh glides ghost-like over the snow on its iron runners, and thus it is that the City of the Czar is as still and hushed as though it were a vast cemetery. We might call it by a worse name, but we will not.

On the contrary, we will beg the reader's pardon for keeping him so long out in the cold, when within the wealthy Englishman's domicile all is so warm and snug.

See, the breakfast parlour is furnished in the cosiest English fashion, and, instead of the one suffocating Russian stove, a bright fire burns in the open steel grate.

The windows and doors are double, for that is a necessity in such a clime; but this is the only thing (if we do not look forth from the windows) calculated to remind us of Russia, save, perhaps, the nature of the food and drink.

For father and daughter are at breakfast; and the former has been long enough in the land of the Czar to prefer a slice of lemon to cream in his tea, and also to have a partiality for caviare and toast, for roast duck with vinegar and cream sauce, and meat puddings boiled in milk.

Ada contents herself with plovers' eggs and thin bread and butter—in fact, the meal with her is a pretence.

"Papa, do you think that you shall *always* live in Russia?" she asks, abruptly, after a while.

"No, my child, I do not. When I have grown too old or too infirm to be of any further use I have every hope that the Emperor will permit me to return to England."

"Oh, papa, how could you have sold your liberty?"

"My dear, when younger I thought that golden chains would be very

light and pleasant to wear. I knew that in England I might toil on for weary years and never become rich, and so I came hither. I succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations. My skill in shipbuilding at last attracted the attention of the Czar, who offered me large government contracts at most remunerative rates, on condition of my becoming a naturalised Russian subject. He said he would not trust the building of warships to one whom he had not the power to punish if he betrayed his trust, or to one whose interests were more foreign than Russian. I jumped at the glittering bait, and the result is that I am a millionaire, and called the Father of the Russian Navy. I will not deny, however, that at times the golden shackles seem to gall me almost as much as iron ones could do."

"And yet you are high in the Czar's favour. Poor Czar! how glad I am that he escaped the assassin's bullet last night," exclaimed Ada, with a sigh.

"And so am I, my child. The Emperor is a good man, and would do much more for his people would his great and powerful nobles only let him. I wish that the young Englishman, who alone seems to have attempted the capture of the assassin, had been equally fortunate with the Czar, but he received a very ugly stab, and his prey escaped him. He was borne to his embassy insensible."

Ada's beautiful face turned deathly pale as her father concluded. "His name?" she asked, tremulously.

"I really do not know it, but he wore the uniform of an *attaché* of the British Embassy," replied Mr. Bayard.

"Oh, then it is he—it is Sir Harry Gordon. I—I knew him in England. We renewed our acquaintance last night. He was—Oh, goodness, what can *that* be?"

Ada's concluding remark was caused by (novel sound, indeed, at the breakfast hour) a thundering knock at the street door.

Flying to the window, she looked forth, to behold a sleigh, shaped like a swan, standing out in the snow, and seated within it an ichvostchick, or driver, clad in a velvet caftan, trimmed heavily with fur, and wearing a broad brimmed, low-crowned hat of the shiniest nap, decorated with a velvet band, a silver buckle, a bunch of rose-coloured ribands, a bouquet of artificial flowers, and a long peacock's feather.

She caught sight, too of a portion of a tall, stalwart figure, draped in a long loose cloak of sables reaching to his gold spurred heels, standing on the doorstep, and whilst she yet gazed she heard the door opened by the dvornic, or hall porter, and this individual asked imperiously for her father.

"Why, it is Prince Golgorouki's voice," exclaimed Mr. Bayard, uneasily. "Gracious heavens! what can his mission be?"

Scarcely had the words left his lips when into the room stalked the terrible head of the Secret Police.

He had left his cloak of sables in the hall, and now behold him arrayed in a tightly fitting bright green uniform, with heavy bullion epaulettes, a score of medals and orders on his breast, his featherless cocked hat tucked under his arm, and his handsome, though sinister, countenance wreathed in smiles.

"Don't let me disturb you," said he. "Nay, I don't mind if I sit down and join you in a cup of tea. My dear Bayard, I have to congratulate you on your beautiful child being the acknowledged belle of the ball last night. Why, even the Prin-

cess Olga and the Countess Orloff were nowhere."

"My Prince," replied Mr. Bayard, gravely, "the daughters of England do not like such open praise."

"But the daughters of Russia love it, for they do not coquette with truth at any time; and knowing that beauty is the gift of God they are rightly proud of it. I am sure that my little friend there is a deal more Russian than English."

"My love is bestowed wholly on England, though my birth may have been in Russia," remarked Ada, with a burning blush.

"My child, we will excuse you," said Mr. Bayard, hurriedly.

"No, no, do not let us miss a single gleam of sunshine this dull, wintry weather," said the Prince, with a laugh. "Besides, it's on your beautiful child's account that I have come here at so early an hour. You really must not be selfish over her, Bayard. When there's only one electric light in a city, that in winter time is wrapped in twenty hours' darkness out of the twenty-four, it is very ill-natured to keep it all to yourself, and let the general community grope about as it best can by the radiance of tallow dips."

"Your highness, I am afraid that I completely fail to understand you," faltered Mr. Bayard, uneasily.

"Well, well, well, then I will speak plainly. Madame, my Princess, fell into raptures with your little girl last night, and on my telling her that she had no mother, she exclaimed, 'Then I will be a mother to her. Let her father confide her to my keeping, and I will introduce her to the *élite* of St. Petersburg society, and find her a husband from amongst the greatest and noblest.' A good hearted woman is Madame my Princess, and, believe me, your lovely daughter is fortunate in so warmly exciting her sympathies."

"But I have come out to Russia for the sole purpose of waiting on my father," exclaimed Ada, eagerly.

"Noble daughter!" retorted the Prince, with fervour. "But your father is also too noble to accept such a sublime act of self-sacrifice. Youth and beauty do not last for ever, and therefore the offer of Madame, my Princess—"

"We are deeply grateful for," said Mr. Bayard, interrupting him; "but my child is not ambitious, nor am I ambitious for her. I intend, almost immediately, to send her back to England, for the Russian climate is too severe for her constitution, and during the short time that she remains, believe me that she would be far happier by her father's side."

"Oh, but this is insanity, sheer insanity," retorted the Prince, the smiles leaving his face, and a portentous frown taking their place. "The climate of Russia not agree with her? Why, it is her native air. Let me see; she was born in the Podialskeskaia just after you were naturalised. I remember it well."

"No, your highness, before; the child to whom you refer died of the plague, and was buried in the common pit," and as he spoke great beads of perspiration stood on the shipbuilder's brow.

"Ha, ha, ha! Bayard, I believe that I know more about your children than you do yourself. Why, our pretty Ada is junior to the little one who died of the typhus by exactly one year and three months. She was born nine months after your naturalisation, and three years and six days before your poor wife committed self-destruction."

"Was murdered, you mean; ay, either murdered, or else spirited away for some vile purpose; for I never have believed, and never will believe, that the headless body taken out of the Neva was hers, even

though it was draped in her clothes, and had her very rings on its fingers."

"Well, well, my poor Bayard, I am aware that that is a sore subject with you. I don't wonder at it, for your wife was a beautiful woman, a very beautiful woman. But to return to your daughter, you will not *really* decline this magnanimous offer of Madame my Princess?"

"Indeed, but I shall, my gratitude being extreme nevertheless. But I am resolved that my child shall not quit my sight during the short period that she must remain here until the opening of the river navigation. She came out unexpectedly, and much against my will, but whilst she is here I shall guard her as the apple of my eye."

"Then my good offices and the kindly intentions of Madame my Princess are in vain," said Prince Golgorouki, rising to his feet. "Well, I will not be cross with you, for few men have such a daughter. Good morning, Bayard, good morning little one. Why, bless me, how pale and frightened the pretty chit looks! Methinks her Russian birth should have given her courage, ay, and her Russian parentage as well, for I won't allow England one bit of credit in her production."

And, patting her playfully under the chin, with an oily yet sinister chuckle Prince Golgorouki strode out of the room, and house.

CHAPTER VI.

"YOU MUST LEAVE THE CZAR'S DOMINIONS THIS VERY DAY."

THEN Ada said—

"How glad I am that that terrible man left us in a good temper. His manner was kind, and yet I cannot express how he frightened me. How can his wife feel such an interest in one she has only once seen, and never even spoke with?"

"Do not ask me, my child," answered Mr. Bayard. "Her husband's wishes are perforce hers; she is his creature, his slave, hardly daring to call her very soul her own, and obeying him in all things with the most spaniel-like fear. Fool that I was not to hide you away from the man's gaze, as the traveller hides his diamonds from robbers. Alas, it never struck me that you were so beautiful until the mischief had been wrought."

"Dear father, do not give way so," said Ada, crossing over and kneeling at his feet, "no one will dare to tear me away from the shelter of your very roof, and I will never leave it more, though we remain in Russia for years."

"For years?" moaned Mr. Bayard, "you must leave the Czar's dominions this very day. You should have quitted it the very hour that you arrived therein, had I even guessed that that fiend in human form held record of your being a Russian subject. It places you in his power."

"But see how good-temperedly he went away, papa."

"I have seen him smile over the shrieks and groans of poor wretched girls who were suffering tortures. He uttered a covert threat as he went, which fortunately you did not understand. Yet why should I terrify you needlessly? Prompt action will defeat all his machinations; the railway station is only a mile away, a train starts at 1.30, in five hours you will be on the free soil of Germany."

"Oh, father, father," broke in Ada, "you surely overestimate my peril. Railway stations and such mediæval barbarity cannot exist side by side It sounds impossible."

"It is nevertheless true, Ada. I would not frighten you were it not necessary; but the terror that urges people to rush out of a falling house is a wholesome one. Stay not, then, to pack your things. I will order out the sleigh, ostensibly to take us to the Winter Palace to attend the Czar's reception, and, when half way there, we will turn sharp off for the railway station. You will wear your mask. The iciness of the air amply warrants it. Away, not a moment must be lost."

"But, father, you will go with me? You will not stay behind?"

"Alas, my child, did I accompany you, all my labours and sufferings for a quarter of a century would have been in vain. I should go as a beggar. No, no; I remain here and in perfect safety, believe me. In another five years the climate will have broken me down, and I shall be of no further use. Then

doubtless, the Czar will permit me to return to my native land, and to take all my wealth with me. God knows that it has been too dearly bought to be lightly relinquished. Now go."

And Ada went, for so fearful, yet vague, a terror had by now taken hold of her that she was as anxious to flee from St. Petersburg as folks are to escape from a burning building.

Directly she had quitted the room, Mr. Bayard rang the bell.

"Tell Ivan," said he to the female domestic who answered it, "to have the sleigh ready in the yard in five minutes."

"The snow is deep; hadn't he better bring it round to the door?"

"No, let him await us in the yard," answered Mr. Bayard, curtly, and the woman dropped a curtsey and went to deliver the order.

But she grinned to herself when she had got out of the room, for she scented a reward on the breeze by reason that since the preceding midnight she had been in the pay of the police.

It took Ada only a few seconds to don her sealskins and sables, and to cover her face with her white satin quilted mask.

Such was the usual outdoor garb of a Russian lady in winter, so it was not calculated to attract attention.

Five minutes later they were seated side by side in the ship-builder's beautifully appointed sleigh, and being whisked through the streets at the tails of a pair of noble coal-black *étalon* horses of the Ukraine, whose long silky manes streamed behind them like meteors.

No pedestrians of any claim to rank or title were abroad, but the streets were thinly peopled with the lower classes of both sexes, clad in sheep, goat, or wolf skins, which they wore, for the most part, after the fashion of Brian O'Lynn:

"*With the skinny side out and the woolly side in.*"

Sleighs, too, were gliding hither and thither in many directions, their occupants being generally military personages on duty, for it was not a day to tempt forth pleasure-seekers.

The ship builder and his daughter conversed together in French, for it was the language least likely for their Russian coachman to understand a word of.

The talk had reference chiefly to the journey which Ada was about to take, but suddenly the ship builder's manner changed, and, grasping his daughter almost roughly by the arm, he pointed towards a spot whereat two streets met at right angles, and exclaimed—

"Mark well that place, for there it was that, during the short but sweet summer-time of this icy realm, your poor mother, my beloved wife, was said to have committed suicide."

"Oh, how could she have done it there?" gasped Ada, faintly.

"'Twas easy enough had she possessed a motive for the action," replied Mr. Bayard. "The thoroughfare was being repaired, and there was a big hole in the ground, a hole down through which you could see the rotting wooden logs and piles upon which the entire city is built, as well as the inky hued water into which it must one day sink. Yes, Ada, the time is not a hundred years distant, believe me, when this splendid sham, this modern Tyre and Sidon in one, Winter Palace, Opera House, prisons, barracks, streets, squares—all, all, all—shall return to the mud their father, and to the ooze their mother, from which not even their highest towers will uprear themselves."

"But my mother—my poor mother! I want to hear of her?" pleaded

Ada, with the tears welling into her eyes.

"To be sure, to be sure. Well, Ada, we were both young then, and your mother was well-nigh as lovely as you are now, and but six years older. We had attended a ball at the Winter Palace, and it was urged that she should not return with me, because my droschky horses were fiery and only half broken in, and had thrice nearly upset us in going to the Palace, frightening your mother much.

"So it was arranged that I should go home alone, and that Count Orloff should drive my wife, dropping her at my door on his road to his own. The Count was a bland and highly polished gentleman, and old enough to be the parent of either of us. He was married, besides, and the father of a family, so I treated his offer as a kindly one, and consented to the plan.

"I drove away first, and soon reached home; but not so Count Orloff and your mother. When he appeared it was on foot, and with the tale that your mother, as they were passing yonder spot, had, with a cry, leapt out of the droschky and precipitated herself into the hole that I have spoken of.

"He pretended to be inconsolable, and declared that the water had been dragged, and that next he had dispatched his ischvostchick and droschky to summon further assistance, and, fool that I was, I for the time believed him.

"Like a madman I went and aided in the search, but as I might have foreseen, nothing came of it. A week later a corpse was drawn out of the Neva, half a mile below the Admiralty, the head whereof had been gnawed away by fishes, everyone declared. There still clung to it the rags of your mother's ball dress, and on its fingers were your mother's rings; but though the corpse was so decomposed, I knew that it never could have been hers, and then I saw clearly that a trick had been played upon me.

"Your poor mother was no party to that trick, child. I would not believe ill of her though tens of thousands swore to it; but Orloff was a hoary villain, and as the then Minister of Police was omnipotent in St. Petersburg.

"To have accused him of your mother's abduction would have been equivalent to signing my own death warrant, so I sought for and obtained a private interview with the Czar, and told him my suspicions. But though he pitied me, he refused to believe his Police Minister capable of such an action.

"It is seventeen years since all this happened, but the mystery of your poor mother's disappearance is as great an one as ever. Do you then wonder, my darling child, at my anxiety to get you safely away from this terrible city, wherein might is right, and the great and powerful cannot be called to account? Ivan, I have forgotten some particular business at the railway station, whip up your horses and drive us there first."

The orders to the coachman had been given in Russian, and he obeyed them on the instant. Five minutes later the terminus was reached.

Mr. Bayard got out of the sleigh and then aided his daughter to alight. They went up the wide, dirty steps on to the platform, and found themselves in a station as large as the one at Charing Cross. But how different was it in appearance. No hurrying porters and no bustling crowds, no comfortable refreshment and waiting-rooms, no Smith's bookstall, no huge, flaring posters.

It was like a large, dingy, English

goods station going rapidly to decay. Much of the glass roof was broken, and the snow, coming through, had accumulated in patches even on the platforms, and no one had thought fit to shovel it away.

Beside one platform was a train, with engine attached. The latter was foul and dingy, without any bright brass work about it, and the former consisted of one passenger carriage and about half a dozen vans and trucks.

"Jump in and hide away in a corner," said Mr. Bayard. "I will get your ticket. Thank God you are off immediately."

He pushed her into an empty compartment, closed the door, and hurried away.

But hardly had he gone when the door was opened again, a parchment white face, adorned with the very blackest of eyes, brows, moustaches, and imperial was thrust into the carriage, and a voice pertaining thereto exclaimed, in excellent French—

"Mademoiselle will be good enough to alight at once."

"Why?" asked Ada, in trembling accents. "What do you require?"

"That mademoiselle accompanies us to the Police Bureau."

"What is all this about? What do you want with my daughter?"

The question was put by Mr. Bayard, who had just returned with the ticket, in tones that he vainly endeavoured to render firm.

"I have a warrant for her arrest, if you will force me to make myself disagreeable," answered the police agent, with a grin. At the same time he raised a whistle to his lips, and in prompt obedience to the summons six grey great-coated, helmeted policemen lounged across the platform to his side.

"Oh, we don't mean to make any resistance," said Mr. Bayard, with blanched lips. "But on what charge is my child arrested?"

"*Salvo dielo*, high treason, attempting the life of the Czar," answered the police agent, curtly. "So come along."

CHAPTER VII.

"GOD IS TOO HIGH AND THE CZAR IS TOO FAR OFF."

For a moment or two after the police officer had spoken, Mr. Bayard was too agitated to make reply to the terrible charge that had been preferred against his beloved child. At last, however, he gasped forth—

"Where are you ordered to take us? Before the Police Minister?"

"I am ordered to take *you* nowhere. My instructions were that the greatest courtesy and politeness were to be shown the lady. At the same time I was directed to inform her that his highness Prince Golgorouki requested that she would present herself before him at once."

"She shall, and I will accompany her," answered Mr. Bayard, firmly. "May we proceed thither in my own private sleigh?"

"Assuredly, on your promising to make no effort to escape."

Effort to escape? Had not the shipbuilder's heart been bowed down with a deadly fear he must have smiled at the grim irony of such a retort.

What, escape out of a city that of itself is one vast gaol, and wherein every second man is a spy upon his neighbour and every tenth in the direct pay of the Secret Police?

Now that the wires of that infamous tribunal had really been set in motion, the brilliant Russian capital, though unwalled, and possessing steamship wharves and railway stations, was a stronger prison fortress than even Newgate.

Seeing that an answer was expected from him, Mr. Bayard promised that there should be no attempt made to escape, and that he would, furthermore, drive his daughter to the Prince's palace at once; and then the police agent smiled, and bowed profoundly, and requested the "suspect" and her father to be good enough to leave the station in advance of him, and to re-enter their sleigh as though nothing had happened.

Mr. Bayard felt his beloved child's arm tremble within his own as they descended the wide, dirty wooden staircase of the railway terminus.

"Oh, what have I done? What *can* be the meaning of it all?" sobbed Ada.

"Indeed, my poor girl, I cannot even guess. A scheme of the police to enable them to dip their hands into my full coffers, I imagine, for many a crime is invented in Russia in order that it may be paid for instead of punished But fear not, my darling, for if it be worse than I expect, I will go straight from the palace of the Russian Police Minister to that of the British Ambassador, and get him to bring the matter before the Czar. He, at all events, will do us justice."

"Alas, my father, do you not know the common saying in this unhappy country, that 'God is too high, and the Czar is too far off?'"

"The Czar will not be too far off from the Ambassador of England,

though he might be to humble individuals like ourselves, dear Ada."

"But, father, what is it that I can be charged with?"

"I trust that you made no incautious observations at the ball last night?"

"Only within the privacy of a private box, where none could hear me."

"And who were you conversing with? Not a Russian lady, I hope?"

"No, papa; with a young *attaché* of the British Embassy, whom I previously knew at home in free, happy England," replied Ada.

"And the name of this officer, my dear?"

"Sir Harry Gordon," answered our heroine, with a charming blush.

"Gordon, did you say? Why, I am very much afraid that he was the young officer who was so seriously wounded last night in attempting to arrest the miscreant who fired at the Czar. Oh! what have I said? Ada, what ails you, my child?"

Well might the old man put the question, for Ada had suddenly given a short, quick, gasping cry as of pain and then sunk back in the carriage as though about to swoon.

She made no answer for a few seconds, and then she said—

"Papa, if anything should happen to me worse than we at present fear, you know—promise me that he shall hear nothing about it. I fear it might, perhaps, retard his recovery, for he—he loves me."

"And you love him back again, little trembler. Nay, there is no good denying it, for actions oft times express what words would hide."

"Papa, I have never had a secret from you. I do love him."

"Well, well, I suppose it's all natural enough. Cheer up, Ada. He shall have you if I find him a chivalrous, honourable, and otherwise worthy young fellow. As for this present little unpleasantness, I shall be able to settle it with the Police Minister—have no fear of that. Your old dad's purse is well lined, and Russian officials, from the highest to the lowest, are amenable to palm oil."

"I have a stronger hope even than that. My own innocence."

Mr. Bayard had been too long resident in Russia to believe that innocence of a crime was much of a defence in itself. His fears and surmises were really of the very gravest nature, for he knew well that the Russian police, when they have no case against a "suspect," forthwith manufacture one.

Little, however, did the worthy shipbuilder imagine that the evidence already on record against his beloved child was as black as black could be; aye, crushing and overwhelming enough to bring her within reach of the knout, or even of Siberia.

As it was, he tried to distract her thoughts from unpleasant matters by assuming an appearance of lightheartedness that he was far from feeling, by chatting about the places they passed and the persons they met.

"There goes a young girl no older than yourself, Ada," said he, jerking his head towards a swan-shaped sleigh that at that instant shot past them at almost railway speed. "And yet she sits enthroned in silver, and every night changes notes for gold to the tune of two hundred guineas. That sleigh, constructed of solid silver even to the runners, and rich in carvings of nymphs and cupids, was presented to her the other night by the nobles of St. Petersburg, and 'tis said that the magnificent horses that draw it are the personal gift of the Czar."

"I have surely seen her face in the print-shop windows, papa. Is she not the new Italian prima donna?"

"That and the Goddess of Russia at one and the same time. The nobles would shower diamonds down upon her did but the whim seize them. They tried it with golden roubles the other night, but the proud Queen of Song at once ordered the insulting tribute to be swept off the stage into the orchestra, and so a sum quite equal to four thousand pounds English fell to the lot of the bandsmen. The silver sleigh was, I believe, a kind of *amende honorable*, for 'tis said she refused to sing again in St. Petersburg until some kind of an apology was tendered her."

"I admire her spirit," said Ada. "But has she a father and mother?"

"Neither, so they say, and yet she is as pure as she is beautiful."

"Oh, I should dread what might happen to me in a land like this, were I she. What hazard—what terrible hazard she must run."

"I know not that. Were anything to happen to her it would become a European question. France would at all events draw the sword to avenge her, for she is the idol of Paris as well as of St. Petersburg."

"Oh, papa, the idea of two nations going to war about a girl."

"I assure you, my dear, that I do not exaggerate. Why, when I was a young man, Paris was frantically desirous that France should declare war against England over three ballet dancers, whom higher pay had induced to desert the former country for perfidious Albion. I believe, on my conscience, that the case is no older than the *Illustrated London News*, which was started, if I recollect rightly, in the year 1842."

"Oh, papa, dear! here we are at the Palace of the Police Minister."

"Courage, courage, my child. We'll be out of it again within the hour."

Ada made no reply, for her heart had fairly sunk within her.

The ischvostchick sprang off his seat and gave a timid sounding knock at the grim and frowning portal, which swung open with an alacrity that seemed almost to savour of magic, and Mr. Bayard, descending, lifted his fair child to the ground in his arms, straining her for an instant to his breast during the transit.

"Shall I wait your return, good master?" asked the ischvostchick.

"Wait? Assuredly! Do you imagine that we shall feel inclined to *walk* home on such a day as this?" retorted the shipbuilder, testily.

Then, with Ada leaning heavily on his arm, Mr. Bayard ascended the wide flight of marble steps, and entered in at the open door, which closed as noiselessly as it had opened in the rear of the old man and his daughter, inclosing them within the web of the spider.

CHAPTER VIII.

ADA BAYARD HAD PASSED OUT OF HER FATHER'S SIGHT FOR EVER.

It was a gorgeous and glittering web in all reality—marble halls and staircases, gilded balustrades and lamps, servants in rich and sumptuous uniforms rather than liveries, curtains of velvet and cloth of gold, and great brazen stoves diffusing genial heat all around.

"Is this a friendly or an official visit to his highness?" asked a jager in braided hussar uniform, as he came forward to receive the shipbuilder, at the same time gazing with keen interest at Ada.

Before Mr. Bayard could reply, a voice from a distance called out, "Friendly, show them this way, Paul!" and the jager instantly uncovered his head, and bowed down until his lofty plume brushed the pink marble floor.

A second later the shipbuilder and his daughter were ushered into a magnificent apartment warmed by three fires, in open grates, on the English principle.

Prince Golgorouki sat in a luxurious arm-chair beside a huge desk-table, which seemed to be possessed of a thousand drawers, lockers, and pigeon holes.

It was nevertheless covered with bundles of documents tied up with green tape.

All round the room were shelves filled with large volumes bound in red morocco, and lettered alphabetically in gold.

These contained records from the lives of pretty nearly every Russian born into the world; for the Secret Police watch the movements of each subject of the Czar, from his cradle to his grave, and every suspicious action that he may commit is jotted down in these volumes.

Whenever it is required, the muddy depths of the past are stirred up against a wished-for victim, the machinery at the command of the Secret Police is set in motion, and it becomes an impossibility to escape from their wide spreading net.

Every avenue, every outlet is guarded; the "suspect" is so surrounded by spies, that his every word is weighed, his every look watched! his servants, and sometimes his very wife and children, are bribed or bullied into bearing evidence against him, and though his foes may be baffled or eluded for a time, yet, when once fairly upon the track of their pointed-out-prey, like the bloodhound, they are sure to run him to earth in the end.

Prince Golgorouki received his visitors with a smile.

"I am grieved at the necessity of interrupting Mademoiselle's journey," he said, "but perhaps you may not be aware, my dear Bayard, that, as a Russian subject, she had first of all to obtain the Emperor's permission, through me, his Minister of Police, to allow her to travel?"

"Your highness, my daughter is a subject of England, a country that knows no such rule or law—a country whose people are free as air."

"I have nothing to do with the laws of England, which may possibly be well suited to that country's inhabitants. *My* duty is to administer the laws of Russia, and as I informed you very clearly this morning, your daughter is a *Russian* subject. Do you require the proofs?"

"Your highness, I am aware that my youngest daughter, who died of—"

"Yes, I know what you would say; but your ingenious theories will count for nothing against facts. One of yonder volumes contains the dates of your children's births, with every particular about them. So now suppose we let your daughter go and have a chat with Madame, my Princess, whilst we converse together on a very painful subject that it would distress her much to join in?"

"Good heavens! your Highness, has it reference to my daughter or to myself?"

"You shall know directly we are alone;" and, crossing the apartment, the Prince pressed one of a line of ivory knobs, and a distant bell was heard to ring.

Presently one of the room's many doors was opened, and a servant girl, clad more in French than in Russian fashion, entered.

"Marie, escort this young lady to her highness, your mistress's presence, and announce her as the visitor who was expected."

Ada looked up at her father to know what she was to do.

"Go, my dear," said he, drawing her towards him and kissing her fervently, "go."

The next instant Ada Bayard had passed out of her father's sight for ever.

"Now, sit down and listen to what I have to tell you," said the Prince, in a changed tone, directly the door was closed. "Your daughter stands in imminent jeopardy of the knout, and of Siberia in addition, if she survives its infliction. I am the only man in Russia who can save her."

"Your highness, there is not a man in Russia who can accuse her of crime. A young girl of eighteen, fresh out from England, and who has never quitted my roof-tree without me—why, what harm *can* she have done?"

"Attempted the life of our holy father the Czar, and with a weapon which bears your initials. There, do you know that revolver?"

"It is indeed mine! But I left it locked up in my desk yesterday evening; that I will swear. Besides, Ada never handled a pistol, and is so gentle hearted that she would not hurt a worm."

"Ah, but the Czar is not a worm," responded the Police Minister, grimly. "That pistol was found with three chambers discharged—the exact number of shots that were fired at the Emperor—on the floor of the box she was known to have occupied, immediately after she was seen to hurriedly quit it. Her companion therein was a young foreign officer, with whom she had been heard to exchange strong revolutionary sentiments."

"No, no, no," gasped Mr. Bayard. "The Police have fallen into some great, some terrible error. My daughter has no revolutionary ideas —not one."

"The Russian Police *never* make a mistake. They took down her very utterances, which were in English. Her companion remarked that the paternal government of our holy father, the Czar, 'was an infamous one that should be swept from off the face of the earth,' to which your daughter made reply that 'were she a Russian man she would help so to sweep it'; after a brief

time she further observed, 'If I thought that the death of one tyrant would make millions happy, I do not say but that I would dare to emulate the action of Charlotte Corday, and fire a revolver at even an emperor's breast.' Five minutes later the Czar entered the Opera House, and she carried her covert threat into execution, as witness your revolver lying there. 'I assure you, Bayard, that I fail to see a single loophole through which she could even hope to escape. I have myself endeavoured to shake the testimony of the witnesses, but in vain. Now you have the exact position of the case."

"Oh, my poor girl! she is the victim of some infernal villainy."

"I hardly think so. I have the sworn depositions of the respective witnesses, with their names signed thereto. If you would like to read them, I will indulge you, even though such a favour is against all precedent."

"What matters it to me whether the villains have committed their contemptible perjuries to writing or only given them *vivâ voce?* I know it to be impossible that a daughter of mine could have committed such an action."

"And so do I, or be assured that I would not offer to serve her," said the Prince.

"But if you are sure of her innocence where lies her danger, your highness?"

"In that, as a public Minister, I shall have to find her guilty or not guilty upon the weight of testimony that is arrayed against her. I dare not give my own private sentiments any prominence when they are unbacked by facts. So strong is the chain of circumstantial evidence in the present case that I should have to commit *my own daughter* to the knout."

"Oh, my fair, my tender Ada! she would die under its infliction. Think you that were I to offer myself, I would be permitted to suffer in her stead?"

"Certainly not. In Russia the innocent are never allowed to suffer for the guilty."

"But you—you hinted that it was in *your* power to save her?"

"I will attempt it, out of the regard that I have for you both."

"And you will aid her to fly from this accur—this unhappy country, I mean?"

"Nay, that would be as much as my office or even my life were worth. Your daughter must disappear from the world mysteriously and suddenly. It must be understood that the hand of justice has fallen, and that she has been banished to the mines of Siberia. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes; but where will she really be all the while, my Prince?"

"Under a new name in the service of Madame my Princess."

"Ah, I refuse. I at once and for ever refuse your offer."

"Then it will be my most painful duty to sentence her to the knout this very day, and at midnight she will commence her journey to Siberia."

"No, no, no, no, I recall my refusal. Let her enter the service of the Princess, and may God be just as merciful to you as you are to my child."

"Amen!" responded the Prince, with an uncomfortable wince nevertheless. "She shall come to no harm whilst under this roof. I have too much regard for my own safety, understand that, to trust her beneath any other; for mine is the only residence in all Russia, the Imperial Palaces not excepted, which is safe from being visited and searched by the police."

"Yes, yes, there is reason in what you say. But surely I may see my dear child in order to bid her

farewell, for a brief second, and in your presence?"

"That even I can't allow. She is dead to you, Bayard, now, henceforth, and for ever. Nay, do not murmur. That or the knout."

"Oh, I cannot sentence her to disgrace, to torture and to death. Oh, anything rather than that," and, wringing his hands in mute agony, the distracted Englishman rushed from the room, a very madman in his grief.

Directly he had gone, Prince Golgorouki pressed another ivory knob, and a second door opened, giving admission to a seeming ecclesiastic.

"The man who has just quitted me must be followed and disposed of secretly," said the Police Minister. "You understand me, Isaac?"

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE WINTER PALACE—DEATH IN A SNUFF BOX.

When the half-maddened shipbuilder rushed forth from the presence of the Police Minister he sprang into his well appointed sleigh, and on his ischvostchick asking him whither he should drive him, exclaimed—"Oh, anywhere, anywhere," and then sank back into his luxurious vehicle in a state of the most painful and agonized bewilderment.

Should he return to his desolate home? Not yet, not yet, or he would go mad. Should he repair to the British Embassy, or to the Imperial Winter Palace? Alas! the English Ambassador could do nothing for his darling child, she being by law a Russian subject; and the great, the mighty, the all powerful Czar, kind-hearted as he was said to be, was not likely to pardon one who had attempted his life, and with such a damning array of evidence against his daughter, how could he even hope to convince the Emperor that she was innocent.

"And to think that I have spies and traitors in my own household, where I should have thought my lovely child would have been almost worshipped. Yet my pistol must have been purloined and placed in the hands of the police on purpose to wreck her happiness and ensure her destruction. And now she is Prince Golgorouki's victim. I feel it, I know it, and I cannot save her from him except by dooming her to Siberia and the knout."

Such were the shipbuilder's reflections as he was whisked along the magnificent Nevskoi Prospect, with its palaces, hotels, theatres, *cafés*, and splendid shops on either side; a street, or rather a boulevard, three miles long, and with which, London, New York, or even Paris has nothing to compare.

Twice the wretched father was driven up and down the Nevskoi, his mind still a confused chaos of agonized thought, when, all in an

instant, a resolution took possession of him that he would attempt to see the Emperor, and at all risks plead his daughter's cause to him.

"If I win for her a protracted and agonized death, better even *that* than dishonour," moaned the wretched man. "It is instinct that seems to urge me to this step, and on an occasion like the present, instinct is a better guide than reason, because it comes directly from God."

"To the Winter Palace!" he shouted, and then he began to commune with himself after the following manner:—

"The Emperor has shown me many favours, and he knows that I was a prime favourite of his father. All the world declares him to be a kindly-hearted and amiably-intentioned monarch, and he is accessible to all who seek him. I must be sure, whilst I plead for my child, not to inculpate the Police Minister or his underlings, or our secret assassination would be certain. I must pretend that Golgorouki has doomed my child to the knout and Siberia, and beg the Czar, as he is strong to be also merciful, and permit me to send her home to England instead. If the Emperor could but see her, he would *know* her to be innocent. He would understand that angels do not plot murder and assassination. Ha! have I not in my breast pocket the portrait that she had taken just before she quitted England? Happy thought, here it is, and her safety is next to assured. Who could help forgiving the owner of that sweet face?"

The bereaved father pressed the exquisitely painted miniature to his lips, and urged his ischvostchick to drive "faster, faster!"

Five minutes later they were dashing across the great dreary square called Nerwinski Strasse, and soon the yellow-washed walls of the immense barrack looking Winter Palace rose before them.

A long string of sleighs was drawn up before the entrance, where a troop of the mounted Chevalier Guards was on duty in the splendour of silvered helmets and corslets, streaming horsehair plumes, blue and silver uniforms, and real leopard skin saddle-cloths. They were mounted on superb horses of the celebrated Smolensko breed, and made a gallant show.

It was the Czar's reception hour, and the great shipbuilder had no difficulty in getting into the palace along with the other callers; for the paternal Government of Russia, haughtily patrician as it is supposed to be, loses no opportunity of flattering all those (foreigners especially) whom it can turn to profitable account. Mr. Bayard was pre-eminently one of these.

So, presently, the Father of the Russian Navy, as the late Emperor Nicholas had in a moment of good temper one day dubbed him, found himself in a magnificent ante-chamber, rubbing shoulders with proud nobles, and epauletted general officers, judges, statesmen, and high dignitaries of the Church.

Poor Mr. Bayard did not feel so confident of the success of his mission now that he stood amongst all those grandees of the Russian Court. He felt his own littleness as compared with their at all events *seeming* greatness.

He drew forth his child's portrait again, and was regarding it with tear-dimmed eyes, wondering whether with it to help his pleading, he could possibly fail to win mercy from the Czar, when a sleek looking ecclesiastic drew near him, and, with a courteous bow, proffered his open snuff-box.

Now, snuffing is an almost universal vice in Russia, and to refuse to take a pinch from a proffered box is

considered equivalent to an open insult to the offerer.

Mr. Bayard therefore dipped a finger and thumb into the apparently rich rappee, and sniffed it up his nostrils.

The papa, or priest, pretended to imitate his example, then closed his box with a snap and pocketed it.

The mission of Prince Golgorouki was accomplished and Mr. Bayard had something less than three minutes to live.

The police agent having done his work, mixed with the glittering throng, and quickly glided out of the apartment.

The levee went on, name after name was monotonously given forth by the page on duty, and as the dismissed caller came forth the next summoned entered the presence chamber.

"Mr. Bayard, the Emperor receives!" at last called out the page; but the shipbuilder was, to all appearance, sound asleep, in his chair.

"Mr. Bayard, the Emperor receives!" again reiterated the page; and then he added—"Do kindly rouse him. Surely no one but an Englishman would be guilty of such a solecism at such a time and place."

Thus urged, two military officers high in rank, who were waiting their turn, laid each a hand on the broad shoulders of the shipbuilder.

Then one of them, with an uneasy start and look of surprise, slid his hand down his arm until his finger and thumb closed around his wrist.

"You had better call the next name," said he. "The Father of the Russian Navy will never be roused again until the last trump shall sound."

"Colonel Kutusoff, the Emperor receives!" cried the startled page.

But ere the personage addressed could make a move forward, the Emperor himself strode past the page, and entered the ante room.

"What! poor Bayard, my father's favourite Englishman, dead?" said he. "Did any of you observe whether he seemed to be in good health on arriving?"

Several of the company, bowing almost to the carpet, assured the Emperor that the shipbuilder had looked very pale and ill not only when he entered, but all the time that he had been there.

"Paulovitch, summon my household physician. Run, boy."

The page hurriedly departed.

In less than five minutes he came back, accompanied by the Court Physician.

In one of the passages, however, a seeming church dignitary had brushed up against the latter, as though by accident, and amidst the plentitude of his apologies had brought in the one word "Police."

From it the Æsculapius at once took his cue.

He examined the dead man with great apparent circumspection and care, and, when he had done so declared, with a solemn shake of the head, that he had died of aneurism of the heart, brought on, in all probability, by incautious exposure to the excessive cold.

Whilst he was thus sententiously delivering himself, the Czar picked up something which had dropped from the dead man's hand to the floor, and as he gazed at it he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"This must be Bayard's daughter who, we have been informed, has lately arrived out from England," said he. "Let the body be borne home, and somebody go before it to break the sad intelligence as gently as possible to his fair child. Assure her before leaving that the Czar is step-father to all the orphans in his realm, and that therefore she must

not consider herself friendless. She shall be sent home to her friends in England when the funeral is over."

"She has already gone, your Majesty," said a voice at the Emperor's elbow. "Her father, finding that her lungs would not stand the cold of Russia, booked her by this morning's train to Berlin, *en route* to England. She is by now a couple of hundred miles on her journey."

It was Prince Golgorouki, the Police Minister, who spoke. None had seen him enter the room, but there he was, as calm, bland, and unruffled as it was always his wont to be.

The Emperor seemed to be somewhat disappointed by the intelligence. He, however, pocketed the miniature that he had picked up, and said—

"The poor girl is spared a most painful trial. Let Mr. Bayard be conveyed to his mansion on the Ingliskaia Naberajenia. I decree that he has a State funeral in recognition of the important services which he has rendered his adopted country. Golgorouki, you will see to this."

And then in half a dozen words the Czar intimated that the day's audience was over.

"The little fairy will cost me a fortune in bribes," muttered the Police Minister, as he drove rapidly homewards, "and by St. Isaac, as soon as I tire of her I shall have to consign her to Siberia or the tomb for my own safety's sake."

CHAPTER X.

SHE WAS BUT A SINGLE LIMB OF THE HUGE, HIDEOUS POLICE SPIDER.

Return we now to the loves and hates of the Princess Olga.

The day on which her debts were to be paid off and she was to be started afresh in the world, as the possessor of a handsome annuity for performing the work of a police spy, passed quickly enough in plotting out, over a roaring fire, her future campaign of deceit and fraud.

In the evening a police agent called upon her with two bags of gold, her official appointment, and the information that everything which the Police Minister had promised her had been performed.

The Princess dismissed the man with a handsome present, but when he was gone she hissed between her tightly clinched teeth—

"And he sends an underling to wait on me—on me, a princess of the old Russian blood. Was there ever such a studied insult to one of my rank and beauty? Ah, Golgorouki! you have made me your servant, and I daresay it pleases you to treat me as one, but the day of retaliation may come, and then I will show you what a princess is capable of."

Half an hour later she, for the

first time, learnt that the officer who had been assassinated in the theatre was no other than Sir Harry Gordon.

She smiled when she was told that strong hopes were now entertained of his recovery.

"He will be spared to me," she said to Baba, who was her informant, "and believe me, little pig, that when I have swept that mawkish, milk-and-water, blonde English woman out of my path I will twine him round and round my little finger just like that," and she exemplified the process with a crimson ribbon she had in her hand.

"Miss Bayard is already removed from your highness's path," said Baba meekly, and yet not without a faint ring of triumph in her tone. "By the doctor's orders, I believe her father sent her back to England this morning."

"What! and at the ball last night? Baba, you are jabbering nonsense."

"It is as certain, my lady, as that her father died some hours later at the Winter Palace, whilst waiting to be presented to our holy father, the Czar. I had it all from their ischvostchick, Ivan, with whom I am keeping company."

She did not think it worth while to explain to the princess her reason for keeping company, as she called it, with that anything but good-looking individual, which was in order, sometimes to learn how her old master and his family (whom she remembered with much affection) were getting on.

"I don't believe a word of your tale," exclaimed the Princess Olga, passionately. "Only credit a quarter of what you hear, and half of what you see, in Russia, more especially in St. Petersburg. Nothing but some imminent and pressing danger would have induced Mr. Bayard to send his daughter away from the capital in such haste, and nothing but some terrible fear or appalling catastrophe could have caused a strong, hale man to die so suddenly as you say the English shipbuilder has done. Baba, there is more, after all, in this story of yours than meets the eye. I am now actually disposed to believe about half of it; but you may go."

The Princess would not suffer her hate or her anxiety to sleep.

Was she not now police agent as well as princess, and in the former capacity could not her crooked fingers reach all over the vast Russian Empire—from the brilliant capital to far Kamtschatka?

True she was new in her appointment, and so deemed herself a wire-puller instead of the puppet that is made to dance, whether it will or no, at the end of such wire.

She was, in truth, but a single limb of the great and hideous police spider, whose web was the sumptuous palace of the real ruler of Russia, Prince Golgorouki.

She was but a poor little member that would be ruthlessly lopped off if found of greater hindrance than benefit, and Monsieur, the spider, would get on just as well as though he had undergone no amputation. Right soon, too, another such limb would grow out in its place.

Perhaps it was but natural that the Princess should feel as vain of the new and terrible power that was vested in her as the boy ensign is of his first uniform. Perhaps, too, it was but natural that she should lose no time in exercising it.

She first called, without the least regard for appearances, at the palace of the British Embassy, to make inquiries after the health of Sir Harry Gordon.

She had informed herself beforehand exactly how he was, but she drew up at the door, and sent in her

inquiries and card, in order that when he became sufficiently convalescent he should be obliged, by the law of common courtesy and gratitude, *to call upon her.*

"When," she muttered fiercely to herself, "I will win him away from all the wax dolls in the world—ay, pluck his heart from another's keeping, no matter how tight her present hold on it may be—and win it, not to wear it, for I could never love one who has despised me, but to break it, and then to cast it down and trample it under my feet."

She next proceeded to the railway terminus, and insisted on interviewing the station master.

"Had a lady taken a through ticket for Berlin the previous morning?"

"No; but a gentleman had taken one for her," was the prompt reply.

"Well, you cannot dispose of more than two or three such tickets a day, at this time of the year. You noticed the gentleman — possibly knew him?"

"It was Mr. Bayard, the English shipbuilder. The passenger was his daughter."

"And she left in the train? Nothing rose to prevent her departure?"

"Nothing. She left in the train, and reached Prussian territory in safety."

"Ah, how know you that? Her movements must have been watched?"

"It was telegraphed on to detain her at the frontier until further instructions arrived from the Police Bureau, but the wires were set in motion too late."

"And of what crime was she suspected?"

"You must be young in the police to imagine that I was told that."

"You have told me everything that I particularly wished to be informed about, and that suffices. I wish you a very good day."

And with a scornful laugh the Princess walked away.

"She thinks herself very clever, I've no doubt," muttered the station-master to himself directly she was gone. "I shouldn't wonder," he added, "if a glance at her equipage wouldn't enlighten me somewhat. She's an ill-trained hound to fly at her own game, anyhow, and I'll bet she'll be taught better habits, or be cast out of the pack before she's many days older."

Thus soliloquising, he hurried into a room whose window commanded a view of the street.

Breathing on, and scratching away at the thick coating of frost upon the glass, he soon had a peephole, and putting an eye thereto he peered forth.

"Ah, the Princess Olga's turn out. The Police Minister has got a skittish colt in her, or I'm much mistaken. Well, no man knows how to use whip and spur better, and her glossy flanks will soon feel both, or I'm greatly mistaken. 'Twas lucky that I had received his highness' instructions, or I might have made a fool of myself, though perhaps he sent the woman here on purpose to test my fidelity. I must now take him an exact account of what has occurred, or I'll find myself in Queer Street."

And before the Princess' sleigh had disappeared from view, the station master was himself wending his way towards the palace of the Police Minister.

As for the Princess Olga, she had taken all that the station master had told her with a very considerable pinch of salt.

The narrative was certainly plausible enough, and the fear of his daughter's arrest might have prompted Mr. Bayard to seek the Emperor, and the consequent agitation have caused his death from heart com-

plaint ere the interview was obtained.

Still, an instinct of hate seemed to whisper in the Princess' ear that her rival was still in St. Petersburg; and remembering Prince Golgorouki's assurance that her position as police spy would afford her an opportunity of gratifying her private hates, and open all official sources of information to her view, she resolved to apply at the fountain head, and consequently directed her ischvostchick to drive her to the Orphan Asylum.

CHAPTER XI.

"ONCE A POLICE SPY, ALWAYS A POLICE SPY."

THE Orphan Asylum adjoined the abode of the Police Minister. Many charitable ladies visited it daily, and so female police agents excited no attention in passing in and out of its ever open doors, whereas had they frequently and openly called at the palace of Prince Golgorouki suspicion would soon have been engendered and their profession before long been shrewdly guessed at.

It was at the door of the huge, barrack-like Orphan and Foundling Institute that the Princess Olga alighted, bidding her ischvostchick await her return. She entered the building, visited one or two of the wards for form's sake, eventually passing upstairs and looking into the sick dormitory, and thereafter traversing a long passage, and turning into another that seemed to be terminated by a huge clothes press or cabinet.

She drew a key from her pocket and inserted it, not into the ostensible keyhole, but into one that only became revealed on the pressing on one side of one of the seeming drawer handles.

Then ensued the sharp click of a lock, and lo! the entire arrangement was an ingeniously contrived door.

Passing swiftly there-through, she closed the secret door behind her, and hurried along another passage, very narrow and dark, until she came to a second obstruction, at which she gave three sharp taps. She received no answer, and after a little while she repeated the signal. Still no response, and the Princess began to lose her small stock of patience. She essayed to open the door herself, though with little hope that she would succeed. The effort was successful, however, and the Princess entered a sumptuously furnished chamber—the private bureau, in fact, of the Police Minister. She cast a rapid glance around the apartment. It was empty. Across the back of a velvet couch, however, was carelessly thrown a woman's bonnet, mask, and cloak.

What could *they* mean in such a place?

A reply seemed to be immediately given to the Princess' mental query, a reply that came in the shape of

shrieks from some chamber or dungeon beneath her feet, and between each agonized utterance she could hear a dull, blunted sound, like something falling upon naked flesh.

"Some poor creature undergoing the punishment of the plet or knout," thought the Princess to herself; but she didn't shudder until she began to vaguely wonder whether she should ever do anything to render herself liable to such a doom.

Then an icy coldness seemed to creep up her spine, and she turned pale and shuddered.

She became so engrossed by these painful thoughts and fears, that she took no further heed of the shrieks of anguish which still continued to ascend from below, nor observed that they at length died away into muffled moans and sobbings.

Presently one of the many doors in the room was opened violently, and in stalked the Prince, wearing a flushed and heated countenance.

"Ha, you here?" exclaimed he, with little show of courtesy. "How got you in?"

"I several times repeated the signal, and then opened the door."

"Ah, I had forgotten to lock it on the inside, I suppose. I am not often so thoughtless. But why have you called? I sent you no summons?"

"Perhaps I have paid you this visit on private business of my own."

"My servants are not expected to have any private business of their own. Their time, ay and their every thought and wish, should be engrossed by the interests of the State."

"You should have told me all this ere you tempted me to enter your service. Instead of doing so, you expressly promised me that my new position should give me every opportunity of gratifying my private hates and piques; nay more, that all sources of official information should be open to me."

"Did I? Well, well, have patience. And so, amongst your other accomplishments, you know how to hate well?"

"Yes, I can hate men who slight my rank and despise my beauty, and I can hate women who excel me in loveliness and use it to my disadvantage. I can assure your highness that there are very few men and women in the world whom I have any reason so to hate, and therefore the feeling is intensified towards those who do give me cause."

"'Pon my honour, your speech is equivalent to a direct threat levelled at myself."

"Perhaps it is fortunate for your highness that you stand too high to be stricken. One day I may try to win your heart, and if I succeed, I will break it."

"You may spare yourself the labour. As I hinted to you once before, *brunes* have no attraction for me. Were you an adorable blonde now, with a skin that suggested the idea that milk flowed in your veins in lieu of blood, such a blonde as the young English girl who was the belle of the ball the other night, you might have little difficulty in bringing me to your feet."

"Ha! Prince, you know something about that girl; it is Ada Bayard, the English shipbuilder's daughter, of whom you speak. With your heart so set on her you would never have allowed her to slip through your fingers. I know you too well—all St. Petersburg knows you too well—to believe *that*. The tale they tell about her having got safe out of Russian territory—"

"The tale *who* tell?" interrupted the Prince, in a voice of thunder.

The lovely Princess was appalled. She had never, all her life through,

been once addressed in this tone or manner. She had taken her full share in the bullying of others, but she had never before been brow-beaten and bullied herself.

"How *dare* you question me so imperiously?" she demanded.

"Because you are my servant, my slave. Because you take my pay, and consequently must do my bidding, that is why I dare."

"I will retire from your service to-morrow, and defy you."

"It is too late. Once a police spy, always a police spy. There is only one excuse on which you can resign your office. Shall I tell it you?"

"Upon my word I should feel extremely obliged for the information."

"I freely give it. The excuse is simply ill-health."

"Then if you become the tyrant, be assured that I shall become the invalid."

"In which case the Bureau's physician will attend you without charge. Poor man, he has a few hobbies, but we always humour them. If a patient is seriously indisposed, he advises that he or she shall be locked up for the remainder of life in a government establishment, wherein there is no danger of draughts, over-feeding, or under-dressing. I noticed that your ball dress the other evening was very *décolleté*, and he might prescribe a dose of the plet or knout to rob so interesting an invalid of the desire ever to appear in so cold-catching a state again. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, you may as well finish, since you have got so far. What would he prescribe for a less serious illness?"

"A few years' change of air to the bracing climate of Siberia, with just sufficient of compulsory exercise to keep the body in health and the mind free from corroding care. You've read of the quicksilver mines?"

"Stop, stop! I have heard enough," gasped the by now panic-stricken girl. "You are a man of blood and iron, or you would never threaten one of my sex, age and beauty thus. I will obey you whilst I hate you, for you have your heel upon my head. But—but—but—*must* I forego all my private hates? This Ada Bayard?"

"Here is her name written on this slate," said the Prince, as he took a little mahogany-framed one down from the wall. "You see it? Good! Well, now I take this damp sponge, pass it across the slate, and it is gone."

"And what am I to understand from that?" asked the Princess Olga.

"That you must erase every thought of her from your mind, and every word respecting her from your tongue, just as completely. Russia knows no more of the beautiful young English blonde—she has come and gone like an angel's visit. Even her father's curiosity concerning her was punished by Providence in a most signal manner. Angels do not like their movements to be too closely watched, especially by malignant spirits."

"You hint that I am one of the malignant spirits! May I ask you, in turn, if you are enacting the rôle of guardian and protecting angel?"

"I could perform that office if I cared for it, better than any man in Russia, our holy father, the Czar, perhaps, excepted; but even my powers fail at the confines of Russia. I am neither dreaded nor loved beyond them."

"No one, once within your power, could ever repass the confines of Russia, unless you willed it."

"Tut, tut, Princess, I am not in-

fallible. But enough of this silly babble. Ada Bayard must be no more talked of or thought of by either you or me. Consider her as dead, and remember that those who dig in charnel pits are pretty sure to catch the plague. You heard sundry screams just now? The woman who uttered them had committed an indiscretion of the kind that you seem to be addicted to, and it became my duty to administer a simple corrective. Her back was like a glorious marble statue's when first she bared it. Were you to see it now, you would fancy that she had died from spotted typhus. Those are her things upon the sofa. She will never want them more. An hour ago she was a fine, noble looking woman, and a *police spy*, now she is about twelve stone weight of carrion."

"And you dare to tell me that you have committed this fearful deed?"

"Let the fact of my telling you be proof of how little I fear you. None eat of my bread until their bodies and souls are in my keeping, until by the raising of my little finger I could crush them on the instant, in church, theatre, palace—ay, or even within the very throne-room of the Emperor."

At this instant a gong sounded thrice, and the Prince called out—

"Come in!"

There entered a man in police uniform, who informed the Minister, with a cringing bow, that the station master wished a minute's audience.

"I will go to him," said the Prince; "and do you (turning to the Princess Olga) await my return. I have some special instructions to give you."

CHAPTER XII.

"WHEN THAT MAN HAS DONE WITH ME HE WILL KILL ME."

When the Police Minister had taken his departure the Princess almost wholly broke down.

"When that man has done with me he will kill me," she mused to herself. "Can the Czar know half his villainy? Never, never. The Emperor is a humane and merciful man. Though he has been so short a time upon the throne all his subjects know that, as by instinct. He would even free the poor serfs if he dared, but he is surrounded by the creatures of his stern father, Nicholas, and he sees with their eyes and hears with their ears. I wonder would the Emperor stand my friend were I to betray to him all the rascality of his Police Minister? Nothing but the deadliest peril should drive me to such hazardous action—nothing but fear of the knout or of Siberia. And, besides, I must first get the Prince into my power, for at present it is I who am in his. My word against his word and I should go to the wall. Oh, God, it would be to the whipping-post first, and to Siberia afterwards."

At that moment one of the many

doors of the room was thrown violently open, and in rushed a young girl with streaming hair and flushed and excited face, who, although she was dressed in the picturesque costume of a Russian waiting-maid, the Princess immediately recognized as the shipbuilder's daughter.

The fair girl on perceiving that the room she had entered was occupied, was about to beat a hasty retreat, but the Princess said to her, kindly—

"You seem to be in terror, but why should you fear *me?*"

"Oh, I do not, in the least, fear you, now that I look upon your sweet face and hear your kind words. Can you befriend me without incurring any risk yourself?"

"Tell me how you *wish* to be assisted, and I will answer you candidly."

"Can you help me to escape from this dreadful house and restore me to my dear father's arms? Oh, if you can and will, I shall bless you for evermore!"

"I might be able to connive at your escape to my own palace; but if you afterwards attempted to quit it, or to hold any communication with your parent until I told you it was safe to do so, you would involve me in considerable peril."

"Oh, I would rather die than injure anyone who had helped me to escape out of this terrible place! I will do exactly as you bid me, dear lady; but, oh, do not let your gentle heart lead you into unknown dangers! Rather will I pursue my flight, guided only by blind chance, as I have been hitherto."

"Chance will never get you outside the palace of the Minister of Police," rejoined the Princess, smiling in spite of herself at the simplicity of the girl's remark. "But I think that *I* can do it, and rather lift myself out of danger than plunge myself deeper into it by the act. Not a moment is to be lost. Don this bonnet and mask (taking up those that lay on the sofa) and now this long jacket. No, on second thoughts, you shall have one of my own, for I have two on. That's it. Now open and enter in at that door; pursue the passage beyond until you come to another door, which will yield to your pressure, for I did not lock it after me as I came through. You will then be out of the Police Minister's palace, and in the Orphan and Foundling Asylum. Be leisurely and collected in all your movements then, or you may excite suspicion. Follow others, and you will soon reach the portico. Walk slowly forth into the street, and do not ask the way to the Princess Olga's palace until you have crossed the Nevskoi, and passed the Cathedral of St. Isaac on your left. You speak French? Good! So does my maid Lota. Ask for her when you reach my palace, and tell her that you are a compatriot and a milliner, and that I ordered you to await my arrival in my dressing room. Can you remember all that?"

"Oh, yes, every word of it. I will not make a single mistake. On your return home you must try and tell me how I can show my gratitude, by deeds as well as words, for the latter will utterly fail to express my feelings."

"Very well, I will afford you many an opportunity for the exercise of both; but now go, for the gravest perils may attend on an instant's delay. You must not turn out of your road to visit your father, remember *that* above all things. Were you so tempted you would assuredly fall again into the snare, and bring about your destruction along with my own."

"The thought of the latter possibility would alone restrain me. Farewell."

And the door closed behind Ada Bayard's receding form whilst the softly whispered word of adieu still trembled on her rosebud lips.

Directly she had gone, the Princess Olga sank upon the crimson velvet couch in an assumed swoon.

"The Prince said more than enough to me to make a woman with nerves of steel faint away. I fancy I am pale as a corpse with terror, and that will make my condition all the more natural. I have just gambled for a great stake, but I believe that it will save rather than destroy me. I must play my remaining cards with caution, however, for I have an Argus-eyed and hundred-armed antagonist."

Thus ran the current of her thoughts as she lay limply, at full length, on the sofa.

She was too sharp-witted to assume any grace of posture. She even suffered her head to hang most uncomfortably down over the edge of the couch, and an over-turned chair seemed to testify how she had reeled across the room ere she fell senseless at last.

She had lain as we have described about a couple of minutes, when the Police Minister re-entered the apartment, with a most portentous frown upon his brow.

He took in the position of affairs at a glance, and a sneer curled his lips.

He approached the couch and, folding his arms, for a few moments contemplated the prostrate woman.

Then he turned round and took up a long, sharp-pointed stiletto off the table.

He chuckled grimly as he punctured a little hole in his thumb, and watched a globule of blood balance itself, as it were, thereon, and gradually swell bigger.

The chuckle caused the Princess to raise her eyelids slightly, and take a surreptitious peep through her long fringed lashes.

What she saw by no means reassured her, though she could not exactly make it out.

The Prince, now bending over her, gently undid the fastenings of her long sealskin jacket, and laid back the flaps on either side.

He next began to move the point of the stiletto lightly over her body, as though uncertain whereabouts he should thrust it in.

How could the terrified girl restrain her chest from beginning to pant with apprehension, when lying there in anticipation of torture, or perhaps death?

Presently she felt the point of the stiletto gently penetrating her dress, and nature could restrain itself no longer. She screamed aloud.

"See, it is bloodless!" said the Prince, holding the point of the little weapon before her now wide open eyes. "Your fear alone compelled you to cry out, and a woman in a swoon has no fear, because she is unconscious. Now get up, and tell me for what reason you tried to play off this fool's trick upon me."

"Perhaps to discover whether you had a single spark of chivalry in your nature," replied the beautiful Princess, bursting into a flood of tears, for her terror had now increased tenfold.

She knew that the discovery of her swoon being a sham one would make it appear far more probable to the astute Police Minister that she had helped Ada Bayard to escape, than if she had received him, on his return to the saloon, seated calmly in a chair.

Her hope had been that when Ada's flight was discovered, and, perhaps, with it the certainty that she had passed through that very apartment, she would have been

able to adduce the fact of her swoon as the reason why she had not seen her.

She felt that now she was standing on the brink of an awful precipice, with the ground giving way under her feet.

She had contemplated, by a bold and daring intrigue, upon getting the upper hand of her grim employer, and now she felt that she was checkmated instead, *foolmated* even!

"Well," said the Prince, "let me advise you never to try to deceive me again, even in trifles, or you will dearly rue it. Secondly, do not repeat the folly of this morning. I allude to the private business that you endeavoured to transact at the railway terminus. You are intrusted with your exceptional powers for the public weal, not for your private gratification. Another such false step and you are dismissed the service as an unprofitable servant, and we do not pension such; we provide them with a sphere of employ to which their capabilities are better fitted—in Siberia!"

"I will remember all that you say—indeed I will. I will never offend again. No, no, never! And now, dear Prince, your orders?"

"You shall receive them to-night at your own palace. I will do myself the honour of paying you an evening visit. Why does your highness turn so pale?"

"This has been a somewhat trying interview. Am I at liberty to depart? Myself, my poor palace, and everything therein are completely at your highness's disposal. Have you any further commands?"

"Yes. You understand English? Good! Take yourself home, then, and when there, open a Shakespeare, and read 'The Taming of the Shrew.' It will convey to you a good and useful lesson, and, furthermore, amuse you till I come. No braiding of the hair or putting on of apparel for my sake, mind, for it will be only so much time thrown away," and the Prince ironically bowed his visitor out of the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HAD I ARRESTED HER JUST NOW, HER SECRET ALLY WOULD HAVE ESCAPED."

ADA BAYARD implicitly followed the directions the Princess Olga had given her, and soon found herself in the streets, traversing them, to her joy, without attracting observation, quilted masks being no uncommon face covering in Russia in the middle of winter.

Their utility was, indeed, soon revealed to her in a very practical and yet ludicrous manner, for presently she beheld a helmeted, grey great-coated soldier pick up a handful of snow, and, rushing up to a bare-faced peasant woman (we employ the adjective in its literal sense), begin to rub her blue nose therewith with all his might.

Ada was inclined to regard this act, at first, as one of wanton cruelty, but suddenly she remembered having once read that this was a kind of delicate attention paid by Russians to each other whenever a nose or ear was observed to be freezing—an attention which, bestowed in time, prevented the positive loss of those members.

She had just reached the immense Norwinski Strasse, in the centre of which, from an enormous block, almost hill, of granite, rises the equestrian statue of Peter the Great, the horse trampling under foot a serpent, which is supposed to be typical of the barbarism that that monarch raised the empire out of (though, for the sake of accuracy, he should have been represented as *gilding* the scaly monster, not destroying it), when she had to stop suddenly to allow a sleigh to flash past her.

In it was seated a tall, dignified man, wearing a silver helmet, and swathed in costly furs, who seemed to regard her intently as he sped by.

Ada did not observe that he appeared to carry a stream of life and bustle with him, or that many people fell on their knees, and bowed their brows to the very snow as he swept by; and she was about to continue on her way when she felt herself touched on the shoulder, and brought to a standstill.

She looked round, and beheld a man in the dress of an ordinary policeman (the executive, not the secret), who, frowning ominously, said something to her in Russian, in evidently angry accents.

Even in her terror, Ada could hardly help smiling as the thought occurred to her how like he was, in his flat glazed cap and long, ulster-shaped grey greatcoat, reaching to his very heels, to the wooden representations of Noah, or either of his three sons that are to be found in the orthodox toy ark.

As she could not understand a word he uttered, she intimated as much to him in French, which she thought would be a safer language than English.

In the same tongue he immediately rejoined: "Who are you, that allows our father, the Emperor, to pass you by without making obeisance?"

"I was not aware that it *was* the

Emperor," answered Ada. "I have just come from France. I am employed in a milliner's shop in the Nevskoi. I have been out on a business errand, and I am so nearly frozen that I hardly know what I am about. Oh, please forgive me this time."

"Ignorance is not a crime, you may go in peace," was the response, in as good French as her own, and the hand was lifted from her shoulder at once.

"How fortunate that he did not ask me to show my face, or question me more particularly as to where I was employed, or whither I was going," thought Ada to herself, as she hurried along once more towards her goal.

The reader may wonder why the Russian policeman was so obtuse; why, at the very least, he did not make her lift her mask and show her face.

He did not do so for the simple reason that there was no need.

He knew her voice. He had listened to it far too intently a couple of nights previously, with his ear against a little hole in the partition between two opera boxes, to have forgotten it already.

It was, in short, Ivan Reyloff, the secret Nihilist, and ostensible police agent, who had accosted her, and he did not put to her any superfluous question, because he considered it a better plan to have her followed at a distance, and learn all about her destination in that manner.

The ways of the Russian police are as crooked and dark as those of the "heathen Chinee," but at the same time very much more to the point. When they strike it is with a weapon that the victim does not see as it flashes through the air. They well know that to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Ivan Reyloff did not even follow the suspect himself.

She might look back, and guessing his intention, make efforts to baffle it.

He called over to him a seeming moojick, who was in reality a member of the same profession as himself, pointed out to him Ada's receding form, and bade him watch her to her destination, and bring him his report without loss of time.

"Another handful of gold from Prince Golgorouki. I never thought a fly could have got out of that spider's wed. No, nor could it without some extraordinary help from within. Had I arrested her just now, the secret ally would most probably have altogether escaped. Ha, ha, ha! Ivan Reyloff is no fool, or he would not be able so skilfully to serve two masters—masters of such different temperaments, too, as the Police Minister and the Chief of the Nihilists. Well, I take pay from both, and I hoodwink one. I trust to Heaven, though, that I shall never again draw the blood-red card that decrees its holder to be the assassin of the Emperor. It is too risky a game for my tastes, and I might not always be able to shift the crime on to other shoulders, as I did the night before last," and thus reflecting, the double-dyed traitor walked away.

Whether the villain succeeded for long in serving two masters, or whether he fell between the proverbial two stools, the reader will learn as he gets further on with the narrative.

We must now hurry after the poor English girl.

She looked round twice or thrice, as was but natural; but seeing no policeman in uniform upon her track, she came to the very natural conclusion that all was right, and continued on her way.

Once only she paused with indecision; it was opposite to the palace of the British Embassy.

Two English servant-men, in genuine English liveries, were standing talking on the doorstep, and their homely speech, and fresh, honest faces struck a sympathetic chord in her heart.

For a moment the thought struck her: why not rush in at the open doors and claim the protection of the noble lord who so well upheld the interests and honour of England in that capital of polished infamy and sickening corruption?

She knew that it would be extended to her; she knew that that roof also covered one who would shed his last drop of blood to defend her from harm. But whilst she yet hesitated, she remembered her promise to her whom she regarded as her generous rescuer, and loyalty and gratitude forced her on.

Poor girl! had she been able to see into the future, she would have rushed to the protection of the British flag in the panic-stricken hurry with which people tear out of a burning theatre; but she looked upon the Princess as her guardian, instead of destroying angel; so, with a sigh, and one yearning upward glance at the long row of frost-starred windows, she passed on, and presently inquired her way towards the Olga Palace.

But she had not passed the British Embassy unnoticed.

A young gentleman, seated at one of the double casemented windows (in a great armchair, propped up with pillows), saw her momentary pause and upward glance, and these attracting his attention, he watched her walk away, seemed to remember her gracefully gliding gait, so different to the mincing steps of the majority of Russian ladies, and said to the servant attending him:—

"John, clap on your coat and follow that lady, and be sure, when you come back, that you are able to tell me where she lives."

"Yes, sir," rejoined John, and he was off like a shot

A quarter of an hour later he came back to his master highly delighted with himself.

"Found out all about her, sir. No need to follow her far. She's the young Countess Kissemoff—mighty pretty woman, they say."

"Who say?" exclaimed his master, rather imperiously. "Who say, John?"

"Nobody especial, sir," answered John. "I didn't tell 'em my name: but as I know a lot of their jaw-breaking lingo, I used my tongue pretty freely, and asked everyone I met who *she* was. At last a man that they calls a Music—not on account of his voice, I'll swear, for a bear's would sound a deal better in a hopera chorus—told me as she was the Countess Kickemoff, and—"

"Why, you said Kissemoff just now," rapped out the invalid.

"Well, sir, 'twas one of the two, *that* I'd be ready to swear before our own Lord Mayor. He also said as she was rich, and young, and beautiful, and then, as we walked slowly along a little distance in her wake, he asked me what I wanted to know for, and whose servant I was, and when I telled him, he inquired, quite polite, how you was a-getting on, sir. A very civil, well-informed man was that Music."

"Moojick, I suppose you mean? I expect the fellow pumped you quite dry?"

"Lord, no, sir. I kept him to the point, and when I'd got out of him all that was wanted, I wished him a very civil good morning, and came back to you."

"Then, of course, he told you where this countess of his lived?"

"Bless me, sir, if that wasn't a

query as I quite forgot to put to him."

"I thought as much. Why, John, what a confounded blockhead you are!"

"I'm afraid I am, after all, sir. Shall I dart off out, and try if I can come across him again, sir?"

"No, no; I'll be able to get out in a sleigh, myself, to-morrow, the doctor says, and then I'll prosecute my own inquiries. Just see to the stove, John, and give me a cup of tea from the samovar;" and these orders being obeyed, the servant was dismissed.

By this time Ada Bayard, still followed by the moojick (who had pumped Sir Harry Gordon's stupid servant dry, exactly as his master had feared, as well as, it is needless to add, stuffed him with falsehoods in addition), had reached the palace of the Princess Olga, which stood a little way back from the Admiralteeskaia Plochtchad, or great square of the Admiralty, and entering in at the bronzed and gilded gateway, she selected a little side door to knock at, instead of the wide and pretentiously carved front one, and her summons being answered by one of the female domestics, she asked for Lota, and when she appeared, addressed her as the Princess had directed, and was forthwith ushered into a cosy little room, having a bright metal stove in its centre, where she was directed to wait the Princess' return, which she did in a most thankful and grateful state of mind.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I SHALL BE AS A FRAGILE LILY IN HIS CLUTCH! HE WILL CRUSH AND DESTROY ME."

DIRECTLY the Princess Olga escaped from the Police Minister's presence, she quitted his palace in the same way as she had entered it, and sinking almost exhausted into her sleigh, drove home

Her face was as white as any ghost's when she got there, and the first question she asked her wondering servants was if any one had called during her absence.

"A young woman, your highness, from one of the foreign shops in the Nevskoi. She said it was your orders that she should await your return."

"Good, she may be conducted to my bedroom in a quarter of an hour," and without another word the Princess passed noiselessly up the staircase.

"Mine now only on suffrance, and at what a price!" she almost wailed as she looked around her on all the magnificence by which she was surrounded. "That hateful English girl, who is now in my power, is the cause of it all. Had not her superior beauty aroused my jealousy, and stirred up my angry passions the other night, I had not gambled until I was a beggar, and the next morning sold myself, body and soul to the police. Oh, what an iron master I have found! oh, what terrible peril hangs over my devoted head, owing to the step that I have just taken! Fool that I was to dream of measuring my strength against that of such a man as Prince Golgorouki! To-night he calls. Oh, God! what for? Can he suspect anything? If he does he will somehow contrive to find out all, and I shall be as a fragile lily in his clutch. Oh, he will both crush and kill me!"

These were her reflections as she hurried along richly carpeted passages, and at last opened a door and entered a small room.

It was an oratory, and contained an altar, above which was a picture of a very hideous Russian saint (statues and images are banned by the Greek Church), with vases of flowers and candles placed in front of it.

No sooner did the Princess observe that some of the candles were alight, and that a devotee already knelt before the shrine, than her passion, already at simmering heat, fairly boiled over.

"*Swinia! Durac!*" she screamed, seizing the kneeling girl by the ear with one hand, whilst she hit vigorously about the head with the other, tightly clenched. "How dare you trouble holy Saint Sergius with your paltry petitions, when I want him to concern himself wholly about my own special matters? To-morrow I will send you to the police-yard and the whipping post for this. That is to say if I don't take a greater pleasure in whipping you myself."

"Oh, dear mistress, mercy! mercy! It was only one little humble petition."

"Ah, Baba, it's you, is it? What have you dared to ask of the saint?"

"That he would pray for those I love, and watch over them night and day."

"And perhaps I want to ask him something exactly opposite. Was there ever anything more provoking? There is no excuse for you, Baba, for you know as well as I do that the law declares that anyone found worshipping before a holy presentment of a saint which is the property of another, designing thereby to obtain a fraudulent share in the favour of such saint, shall be punished by fine or whipping, at the option of the proprietor of such picture or shrine. Now, that's enough of that for the present. Get you gone, therefore, for I must compose my thoughts for my own devotions," and she beat and thumped the serf out of the room.

Then, clasping her hands together, the lovely Princess (having first lighted all the candles around the icon) flung herself down on her knees before the glittering shrine, and, raising her tear-dimmed eyes to the ugly saint, exclaimed—

"Oh, holy Saint Sergius, you haven't so fervent an adorer in all St. Petersburg as myself. Grant me, then, a complete victory over all the machinations of my enemies, and success in all that I undertake.

"Oh, holy Saint Sergius, I would bare my body and lacerate it with rods in humble penance before thee, was I not sure that the desecration of my beauty would be a cruel and most wicked thing in thy sight. I will, however, have a great many of my servant-women beaten instead if thou wilt but grant my next prayer, which is to give me vengeance over my enemies, and save me from persecution and punishment from all who are placed in authority over me. Oh, good, gracious Saint Sergius, pay no heed to the petitions that have just been offered to thee, for Baba is a low and vulgar-minded serf, and knows not what is good for her: but I am a Princess, and very beautiful, and also, alas, in deadly peril; and if thou wilt watch over me and protect me I can make it well worth thy while, because for every wish that I obtain through thy aid I will add a silver lamp to thy shrine, and candles of the purest wax shall burn before thee night and day. So take me under thy great and powerful protection, most holy and gracious Sergius."

The Princess indulged in this style of praying a good while longer, tears streaming liberally down her cheeks the while from the beauteous eyes that were upraised towards the picture, whilst her whole frame seemed to quiver with the violence of her emotions.

And, lest the reader may deem this to be a mere fancy sketch, or even a reality highly coloured, let us assure him that a scene such as we have described would be nothing remarkable in the private oratory of one of the Russian nobility, that the law respecting the offering of prayers to other people's saints is still extant, and occasionally acted upon, and that Sergius is the very saint whom the Bishop of Sebastopol assured the Russian troops would come down from heaven, and *in person* conduct them to a glorious victory over the English and French at Inkerman, both officers and men believing his promise most implicitly.

When the fair devotee had finished her eloquent petition to the saint for the almost exclusive favour of his intercessory prayers, she crossed herself, rose from her knees, and quitted the oratory, locking the door, and taking the key with her,

perhaps in order to prevent the saint from being pestered by any other supplicant.

Her face was wreathed in smiles now, and she made her way direct towards her sumptuous bedroom.

She found Ada Bayard already there, and the fair English girl at once rose, and, falling on her knees at the Princess' feet, seized her hands and covered them with kisses, at the same time bathing them with her tears.

"Oh, great and noble princess," she exclaimed, "you have delivered me from a fate far worse than death —a doom more terrible than that of the knout even."

At the mention of the knout the Princess felt her flesh involuntarily creep, but she called up a smile, and answered her *protégée* with—

"I am very glad to think that I have been able to serve you. I am partial to English people. Perhaps because my favoured lover—the most handsome and gallant that I ever possessed—is an Englishman; Sir Harry Gordon, of the British Embassy; perhaps you know him?"

"Intimately," replied Ada, whilst her face turned very pale.

"Then you will have an opportunity of frequently seeing him here, when he recovers from the somewhat serious wound that he received the other night. He usually passes half his time with me. Nay, don't look so shocked, for no decorum is violated by such attentions in St. Petersburg. Your compatriot Mrs. Grundy has, thank heaven, never applied for a passport authorising her to enter Russia."

"I am a stranger to your customs," sighed Ada, her heart rankling with the *first* cruel barb her rival had planted therein. "You," she added, "are the first Russian to whom I have incurred a debt of gratitude. I pray heaven that your kindness to a stranger has not involved you in any peril?"

"A little, perhaps, my dear, but I will soon extricate myself from that. I must disguise you beyond recognition, and then the hazard will be past. Your golden hair I will change to black; eyebrows and lashes ditto. I can stop out a few of those pearly white teeth with *Emil Noir*, as they do on the stage, and discolour the others. Dutch chrome, another stage preparation, will render your complexion sallow, and powdered antimony will create hollows underneath your eyes, whose lustre must be hidden by blue or grey goggle-spectacles. We must, with some irritant, cause some soreness and swelling about your mouth, too, for I vow that anyone who has once looked upon those cherry lips would not easily forget them. Why, my dear, you and I must be the two most lovely girls in St. Petersburg. I am nearly nineteen (the fibber was past twenty-one) and you?"

"I am just eighteen," half-sobbed Ada, who, despite her peril, did not relish the idea of her beauty being changed into ugliness.

"Well, well," rejoined the Princess, observing yet ignoring this, "I will soon make you look thirty at the least. We must pad your dresses I suppose, to give you a clumsy figure, for I'm sure I don't know how else it is to be done! and, attired as a Russian maid, I really don't think you need fear recognition."

"Oh, your highness, is there any necessity for all this—this trouble?"

"Assuredly; for suppose the police were to come and search my palace, and there find and recognize you! I might then be sent to Siberia, and you would be certainly taken back to the Police Minister's. I can't conceive what you were there for, or why you desired to get away;

I know, though, that you *did* desire it, and consequently I had pity on you."

"Your highness was my dear, kind, guardian angel; and saved me from worse than death. Do not question me further, I pray you. I would rather die than for the walls of that horrible building to inclose me again. Oh God! the sights which I saw and the sounds which I heard whilst its inmate will haunt me to my dying day!"

"But you suffered no wrong, no hurt; you know what I mean?"

"No, thanks to you, I was saved in time. Oh, do with me what you will—make me as hideous as a witch, if it will but insure our joint safety. How wicked it is of me to be so vain of mere looks!"

"Yes, dear, beauty is very often a greater bane to our sex than blessing; but I will remove the source of danger. Just sit down there. I cannot trust any of my servants, and so I will operate on you myself. Why do you tremble, little white lily? Doesn't the stove give sufficient heat"

CHAPTER XV.

"WHAT! DID YOU NOT KNOW THAT HE WAS DEAD?"

THERE was something in the Princess' look and manner which belied the kindness of her words. With all her art she could hardly hide from the innocent English girl the pleasure that she would experience in changing her beauty into ugliness. She did not tell her (for the simple reason that it would have soothed much of her pain) that the materials which she was about to use to change, so to speak, her identity, could all be washed off in a very few minutes, leaving her appearance just as it had been before, for the Princess' dressing-case was full of preparations that she had been accustomed to use in amateur theatricals, a diversion for which the Muscovite nobility have a great *penchant*, and wherein, on account of her youth and beauty, she had long shone as a bright particular star; so that besides rouge and *blanc de perle*, which stand on every Russian lady's toilet table, she had Mascaro water for blackening the hair, Mongolian for blackening the face, ruddy rouge to simulate sunburn, lining colour for wrinkles, chrome and Dutch pink for making up as an interesting invalid, belladonna to cause the eyes to look large, sad and lustrous; and other cunning and ingenious contrivances too numerous to mention.

She would have found a way to render poor Ada hideous for ever, but for a daring scheme which she had in her mind for baffling the hatred and the vengeance of the Police Minister, if matters came to the worst.

This scheme was to seek, with Ada, the presence of the Czar, and expose to him the villainy and duplicity of Prince Golgorouki, assuring him that she had acted as she had done in the cause of charity and love, and winding up by praying his protection for herself and *protégée*.

"And to succeed we must both look as lovely as ever we can make ourselves," the Princess could not help acknowledging to herself. "For then, and then only, by pleading our wrongs, our sorrows, and our fears with lustrous, tear-streaming eyes, shall we be able to insure our own safety and the downfall and perhaps banishment of the Police Minister. His successor would be too grateful to me for his elevation to so high and profitable an office not to become my devoted friend. Then there will be ample time for me to take my full glut of vengeance against this English beauty, which I dare only indulge in homœopathic doses now, though even they shall be gall drops."

While the Princess was thus scheming, she was by no means idle, for she was operating upon Ada with brisk hands, and every change she made in her outward appearance caused her keen delight, more especially when she beheld the poor girl wince thereat, for she had, previously to setting to work, wheeled a full-length toilet glass into such a

position that her victim could look at herself, and shiver at each ugly transmogrification as it was effected.

When her hair, face and hands had been attended to, the Princess declared that she must change her outer apparel, which must be carefully hidden away, or, better still, destroyed.

Ada made no objection, and the Princess, quitting the chamber for a moment, returned with a Russian female serf's costume, which she laid out on the bed for her *protégée's* inspection.

It was neither pretty nor becoming, or she would not have selected it.

Ada smiled faintly, and five minutes later was arrayed in an over chemise with sleeves reaching to the wrists, a sassafran or red petticoat, with a four-inch deep body attached, and straps passing over the shoulders, thick clumping boots, coarse woollen stockings, and a crimson head-covering that looked not unlike a lancer's schapska, crushed nearly flat.

Lastly, the Princess plaited her now coarse black hair in a thick pigtail, and tied it at the end with a bow of coloured ribbon.

When Ada looked again in the glass, she gazed upon something as unlike her former self as could well be imagined, and felt that she was indeed changed past recognition.

The Princess also perceived that the make-up was complete, and believed that Ada might wait upon her even in the presence of Prince Golgorouki without exciting a suspicion in his breast. Not that she intended to risk it.

"You must be dumb, but not deaf," said she. "We can, then, I think, bid defiance to the police. You shall sleep no farther away from me than the adjoining chamber. At times I must treat you like a Russian serf, in the presence of others, in order to excite no suspicions. My temper is known to be hasty and irritable, and my visitors are accustomed to see me beat my servants over the arms and shoulders with the hardest thing that I find handy. You will have to put up with all that, for our joint safety's sake. Dear Harry, my good looking English lover, often laughs at my little eccentricities, as he calls them."

Ada winced at the conclusion of this speech.

"Surely," thought she, "this beautiful woman must have good cause to think that he loves her, or she would never speak of him thus affectionately and openly. Oh! who is one to believe in this world?"

"Why, what's the matter? You look as though you'd a raging toothache."

"I was wondering, your highness, when I'd be able to see my father?"

"Your father! What, did you not know that he was dead?"

The words were not uttered in a brutal tone, but they were spoken with a most brutal intention, and the Princess was gratified by beholding Ada gasp as for breath, close her eyes, reel, clutch at a chair, which her rival drew out of her reach, and then fall heavily to the floor in a deep swoon.

"Oh, how I would like to dance upon her with sharp spikes in my shoes," muttered the spiteful and vindictive woman as her eyes rested on Ada's superb form, as she lay stretched out on the carpet. "And yet," she added, "if her beauty was less than my own I feel that I could love her. Fancy two different men admiring her more than they do me!"

Thus muttering she left the room to call all her servants together and tell them that she had taken "the French girl who had called" into

her employ, and that for certain reasons of her own she wished it to be kept a secret.

Lastly, she warned them that she could and would pay them higher to keep her secrets than ever the police would bribe them to betray her—that she had made up her mind, henceforth, to grant them many favours and indulgences which they had never experienced before—to give up scolding and beating them; and, in short, to become one of the very best and kindest of mistresses.

All these assurances were, of course, received with an infinitude of bobs and curtsys, and smiles and promises of obedience; and when they were supplemented by a handsome money gift to each, the joy and devotion of the poor serfs seemed to know no bounds, and the Princess Olga was satisfied.

She went back to her gorgeous suite of rooms, feeling assured that she had outwitted the Police Minister, and that the beautiful English girl was hers, to torture in body and in mind as she might feel inclined.

Poor fool! the head of the Secret Police already knew where Ada Bayard was, for the moojick had not followed in the wake of the masked female in vain.

Long ere the Princess had sought the lower regions of her palace to, in modern parlance, *square* it with her servants, one of them, Lota, had been waylaid, flattered, cajoled, and pumped dry of all that was required to be known, and the intelligence had been carried to Ivan Reyloff, and by him conveyed to the Police Minister, who paid him well for the information.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHAT BECOMES OF ONE WHO HAS DONE HER WORK?"

THAT evening, as promised, the *real* autocrat and tyrant of all Russia—for compared with him the Czar was but a lay figure — called upon the Princess Olga at her palace.

She had got herself up with the greatest care to receive him, trusting far more, as she ever did, to nature than to art for a triumph. But the Police Minister hardly condescended to bestow a glance upon her radiant charms.

He returned her greeting coldly and curtly. Refusing to occupy a chair that stood close by the couch whereon she lay, he flung himself into one on the opposite side of the table and said—

"Now to business."

"Come nearer to me, your highness," she rejoined. "I feel weak and ill, and so not capable of raising my voice to converse with you at that distance."

"It matters little, as I have to do all the talking. Your ears are all I want."

"But my cold has affected me with a slight deafness. Shall I come and sit at your feet?"

"By no means. I prefer raising my voice. You needn't wince, for you should know that I am no flatterer. To-morrow you must commence work in earnest. You must cultivate the friendship of the wives and daughters of the French and English Ambassadors and draw from them, little by little at a time, with that artless air of innocence that you know so well how to assume, the views of the sovereigns and leading men of those two nations concerning our projected operations in Central Asia; especially how England would be inclined to regard any further movements of ours in the direction of Khiva, and subsequently of Merv, and whether, as a set-off to either of those moves, she would seize upon Afghanistan, and so for ever check our advance on India. As for France, I chiefly want to know how she would treat any effort of ours to stir up Greece against Turkey, and to espouse the cause of the former State against the latter. I need not tell you more particularly how to set to work, because a woman's tact is always better than a man's; but what you can't get from the women in the daytime you ought to be able to worm out of the young officers of the different embassies of an evening. I don't think that many men, especially those under thirty, could resist your charms, princess, and I depend upon your using them to the best advantage, remembering always that an unprofitable servant is soon discharged."

"And what becomes of one who has done her work, and is no more wanted?"

"Ah, princess, you are inquisitive, and curiosity is almost a vice," grinned he.

"What, am I forbidden to ask

as to my own future, your highness?"

"Conjecture concerning it as much as you like, but ask nothing. Who knows what becomes of the butterflies? They have a sunny, joyous present, and it contents them."

"And, perhaps, when winter comes they have to hide away and die in coldness and darkness. Your highness, I am not an insect, but a young and lovely woman, with hopes, aspirations, and ambitions. I have even an immortal soul."

"I advise you, then, to look well after it, princess. I do, indeed."

"Oh, monster, are you *all* iron?" wailed the beautiful girl, and rising from her couch and coming round to him she continued, "I want you to tell me that you couldn't raise a finger against me—that you couldn't find it in your heart to hurt me. I don't desire to win your love, I only wish to excite your pity. You thrust a sharp pointed stiletto against my breast this morning. Could you do it now?"

"I do not see what could prevent me. Do you?" asked the Prince.

"You don't see what could prevent you? Then you can't see *me!*"

"I don't think *you* could hinder me if I chose to put out my strength."

"Do you mean to say that you would have the heart to hurt me as I stand before you *now*? I will not believe it."

"You give me no reason to hurt you, and I do nothing without a reason."

"Were I a criminal could you, looking at me as I am now, sentence me to be punished? To be beaten with sticks, or lashed with whips?"

"Certainly, without a moment's scruple or hesitation."

"Could you stand by and actually *see* me suffer?"

"Most assuredly, if I thought it would make the executioner do his duty more thoroughly. I often look upon such sights."

"But not upon such victims. I am but twenty. I am the most beautiful girl in St. Petersburg. I can believe my own eyes and my own mirrors, and both assure me of the fact. Oh, for heaven's sake regard me attentively, and then swear to me that my loveliness shall never be marred by your orders. Swear it."

"Ah, you imagine, then, that the necessity *may* arise. Is it so?"

"Oh, no, no; but injurious though groundless suspicions might, in a moment of irritation, induce you to order that which you should rather die than command."

"Have no fear, princess. I never punish on mere suspicion. The Police Bureau never acts until the guilt of the criminal is *placed beyond a doubt.*"

"Oh, would that I could believe so; but I tremble with an ill-defined terror."

"Not produced by a guilty conscience, I hope; for, if so, I pity you."

"There, see how quick you are to surmise evil. Oh, this is terrible!"

"Not at all; for you have nothing to fear so long as you obey me implicitly."

"But if I made a mistake, through over anxiety or some other cause?"

"An error in our business is a crime, and would be punished as one."

"Oh, I will not believe that such cruel bonds encircle me, or that you could act so cold bloodedly and ruthlessly as you pretend towards one who is so young, so beautiful, and so idolized by the many. Look at me, and if you are

the man of blood and iron that your speech bespeaks you, strike me—strike me, I say. I would fain prove that you cannot hurt me, and then I shall not regard you with such terror."

"Is it *necessary*, Princess Olga, that you should *know me to be what I am?*"

"Yes, yes; that is what I *wish* to learn, and so I dare you to the blow!"

She laughed in reckless defiance, but the next instant the blow was struck, and with a force which hurled the Princess to the floor.

When, with a gasping sob, she looked up, the Police Minister was gone.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NIHILIST HAUNT. THE RED CHAIR.

We will leave the Princess Olga moaning and writhing on the floor of her magnificent reception room, bruised even more in mind than she was in body, and filled with the most terrible forebodings and anxieties regarding the future, and we will leave the ruffianly Police Minister being whirled homewards in his well appointed sleigh over the crisp surface of the snow-buried streets, in order to visit a very different scene — to wit, the head-quarters of the Nihilists.

Some have thought Nihilism to be an entirely new feature in Russian social life, but that is far from being the case.

Nihilism has existed in Russia for more than a hundred years, as it always does exist, by that or some other name, in every country that is ruled by the iron hand instead of the loving heart; more especially is it ever to be found where the monarch of a nation is served by evil counsellors and greedy and rapacious ministers, who regard their fatherland as a sponge from which gold is to be squeezed like water.

At the time of which we write, a little more than a score of years ago, the Government of Russia was as cruel and corrupt as ever was that of Nero in pagan Rome.

The highest offices in the State were so miserably paid that unless the holders sold their influence and trafficked in the perversion of justice it would have been impossible for them to live.

So that every official, from the highest to the lowest, was open to bribery, and indeed, courted it, wherefore the prison cell, the knout, and Siberia, were almost marketable commodities which anyone possessed of rank and a long purse could consign another whom he had a grudge against to, by merely paying to have a fictitious case trumped up against him or her, and then bribing the higher officers of justice right and left.

As for the peasants, the wretched serfs—were they the inhabitants of town or country, their lot was almost equally miserable.

The negroes in the Southern States of America were never half so cruelly used.

A Russian serf would have laughed at the whip of Simon Legree as an instrument of torture too light save for the back of a child.

In Russia slaves have been known to bear 1,200 blows of the plet (a huge birch made of split canes) and outlive it, to be beaten so cruelly with the knout that when the flesh healed, their bones could be descried between the corrugated furrows. They have even been made to fight bears, stripped and weaponless, to amuse their master and his guests.

But to return to our tale.

The Podialskeskaia, or Street of the Barbers, is the Whitechapel of

St. Petersburg. Adown its winding, narrow length, which somewhat resembles that of a dog's hind leg, huge posts rise here and there at long intervals, that look like grim gibbets, and each sustains, hung in chains, not a corpse, but a foul and flaring oil-lamp.

The houses on either side the street are built of wood and mud. They are two stories in height, and indescribably sordid and filthy in appearance. There is no pavement, and you step down out of the mud of the street into their still more dirty interiors, and suffer greatly in every way by the change.

The Street of the Barbers seems to contain everything *but* barbers.

There are tractirs, or low tea-houses; there are vodki shops, whose votaries seem to be for ever tossing off tiny horns of that bright blue spirit which, to the uninitiated, tastes like a fiery compound of vitriol, copal varnish, turpentine, and castor oil. There, too, are tobacco shops, and opium dens, dancing and gambling rooms (for your true born Russian, when the vodki is in him, will dance with a great hulking fellow as ugly as himself, and dice, and quarrel, and stab for a lot of metal buttons, rather than not dance or gamble at all). In close proximity to these places of amusement (Heaven save the mark!) are more respectable but equally dirty shops, wherein the sheer necessities of life may be procured, interspersed with corn, coal, and wood stores, whilst high above the reeking mass of squalor, vice, crime, and every conceivable abomination, rises the huge burnished copper dome of the great Cathedral of St. Isaac.

But we have no business to remain outside in the chill street any longer, for inside one of those seeming coal and wood stores, there is a goodly company awaiting us.

Coal? Had we said coke and charcoal, we should have been nearer the mark; and the great black sacks are piled up on one side of the low-ceiled shop to hide a secret trap door in the floor that conducts to a cellar below.

That cellar is at present the headquarters of the Nihilists of St. Petersburg.

There they are assembled, a desperate and needy band, who conceive that it is their mission to topple over thrones and destroy dynasties.

Each man there has suffered deeply at the hands of the constituted authorities, and each man there being as low down in the world as he well can be, is fully aware that naught but an earthquake can ever lift him up again.

Unfortunately there are two kinds of earthquakes nowadays—that of nature's manufacture, which is sadly indiscriminating in its operations, and that produced by dynamite or nitro-glycerine, which may be created, controlled, and localised, by the ingenious to serve their own ends.

The cellar is a great deal cleaner than the shop above, and it is furnished with a table and chairs, and lighted by a silver lamp that hangs from the ceiling. The lamp has evidently been stolen from some church.

There is vodki, of course, upon the table, but not in over abundant quantity, for all the conspirators seem to be aware that it would be inexpedient to tie knots with their tongues that might form a noose for their necks. The table is covered all over with weapons, however, so 'tis evident that these gentry value their lives sufficiently to defend them desperately, should the occasion arise.

One after another they have arrived at the rendezvous, and after outwardly bargaining for the purchase

of coke, coal, charcoal, or wood in the shop above (during the course of which apparent haggling each has had to bring in both watchword and countersign, wrapped up in his bargaining) a sack has been moved, the trap door that it covered slid back, and he has descended the step ladder into the vault.

And now there they are, fourteen in number, sitting as grim and silent as Quakers do at a meeting when waiting for the spirit to move them.

Nearly all are dressed in skins, or coarse camel cassans, and all wear sheepskin masks.

Why are they so silent?

Wait, for at length they are eyeing one another. A minute or so later one of their number rises to his feet and says—"Brethren, we must all uncover, for we have a traitor amongst us." In an instant every sheepskin mask but one is deposited on the table. A brief hesitation and the solitary exception follows the general example.

The face last uncovered looks calm and fearless enough.

"Well," says the only man who has yet spoken, regarding him intently.

"What do you desire of me? I have given all the necessary signs."

"For admission to the conclave. But what have you to say *now*?"

"Nothing that I am aware of more than the rest of you."

A low murmur passed up and down the table as the fourteenth man thus delivered himself.

It seemed to expand into the one word "DEATH!"

"Yes, he *must* die!" exclaimed the spokesman of the assembly, who was no other than our old acquaintance, Ivan Reyloff. "He's a *mouchard*—a spy, or he would have known by the red chair which was given him for a seat that he was the last of the initiated, and that it was his duty to commence the business of the evening by narrating to us the story of his wrongs. We waited five minutes for his utterance, and it came not; I therefore decree, as President of this Tribunal, that, as he came amongst us by one entrance, he leaves us by another—as he journeyed hither by land, that he goes away by water."

Those who listened to this speech indulged, first of all, in a most dismal kind of chuckling, but ere it had entirely subsided two slipped out of their seats and took up their position at the foot of the step ladder, whilst two more got up and glided noiselessly behind him who had been designated a *mouchard* and a spy.

Scarcely had these dispositions been completed when a fifth man lugged a huge pick-axe forth from under the table, and went to work at a certain portion of what seemed to be a hard, mud-trampled floor.

At the first stroke of the pick a few fragments of earth flew about, at the second an iron ring was revealed, and the point of the pick being inserted therein and a pretty considerable amount of strength exerted, a second trap door was raised and a square dark hole revealed, up which came a puff of cold wind that caused everyone to shiver.

"Now for the ice-pole," said Ivan Reyloff. "The hole cannot yet have frozen very thickly over. A few hearty prods and it will be clear again."

At this instant the unlicensed intruder realized the fate to which he was doomed, and was about to give vent to his terror in screams and frantic appeals for mercy, but ere he could utter a sound the two men who had taken up their stations behind him thrust a gag into his mouth, and fastened it in such a manner that he couldn't utter an articulate sound.

He did manage to kick away his seat (the fatal red chair), fall down upon his knees, and raise his clasped hands aloft in eloquent though mute supplication, his eyes starting half out of his head the while, and the great beads of perspiration chasing each other down his face.

But it was all of no avail. He was thrown down, his hands wrenched apart, and his arms bound tightly to his sides.

Then his legs were lashed together, and scarcely was the operation completed when the ice cracked and broke beneath the repeated thrusts of the long steel-spiked pole, and the water was heard to bubble and gurgle beneath it.

Ivan Reyloff raised his arm, and the spy was lifted up off the ground by a couple of Nihilists and slid down head foremost through the hole in the floor.

Two or three heads were thrust forward to see him splash into the water and get sucked under the thick-ribbed ice, but no one was excited over the affair. It was too frequent an occurrence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NIHILIST HAUNT—THE RED HAND.

When the trap-door had been shot back into its place, and the mud stamped down again over its edges and the iron ring, the Nihilists reseated themselves around the table, Ivan Reyloff occupying a stool at the head thereof, and the red chair being left empty.

"Brethren," said Reyloff, "according to custom, each of you will relate a fresh horror that has come to his knowledge since our last meeting, and then give the number of the new recruits he has enlisted in our cause."

"I, Nicholas Prerorowski, accuse Count Orloff of cutting off the ears and nose of a serf for the negligent shoeing of his horses. Two hundred."

'I, Vanko Yamtchsck, accuse Colonel Radetski, of the Regiment of Kazan, of causing a soldier to be bound to a heavy stone roller, which was then set in motion down a steep hill. The man was crushed out of all semblance to humanity ere it came to a standstill at the bottom. Ninety-seven."

"I, Paul Vazof, accuse the Baroness Bernikoff of causing the face and neck of one of her female serfs to be burnt black with lunar caustic through jealousy at the Baron giving the girl, who was well favoured, a present. The poor creature died in terrible agony. Three hundred and five."

"I, Imok Posieniec, accuse the Police Minister of having a noble lady whipped in the dungeons of his palace, and thereafter boiling varnish was poured over her shoulders, because she would not swear away the life of her own father. She died in awful torture. One hundred."

"I, Irbit Nerchinsk, accuse Count Kesselrode of flaying a serf alive because he would not give him his young daughter. Seventy."

"I, Warnak Pæravigæ, accuse Baron Dwinadoff of holding a serf and wolf match on his country estate, near Smolensko, for the amusement of his guests. The combat took place in a deep pit, from which neither serfs nor wolves could escape, and the men where sent in naked and unarmed. Three were killed on the spot, and five wounded past recovery. Eighty-seven."

"I, Peter Petrovitch, have nothing to relate. One hundred and ten."

"I, Paul Paulopodatchkavitch, have naught to record. Nineteen."

"I, Ivan Plaketsky, accuse the Police Minister of sentencing my father to seven thousand blows of the stick, because, through carelessness or accident, he suffered his droschky to graze the flank of one of his Excellency's saddle horses. Half of the punishment was inflicted on my poor father's dead body. I have obtained three hundred and nine new adherents."

"I accuse Prince Semiloff of putting out the eyes of one of his

serfs whom he had had educated and trained as an architect, in order that he should never be able to design for anyone else so beautiful a marine palace as he lately constructed for his master at Odessa. Four hundred."

A brief pause ensued, and then Ivan Reyloff said—

"So we have one thousand six hundred and ninety-seven new recruits. Are they all sworn?"

"All sworn!" answered the Nihilists, as with one voice.

"And each has placed his life in our keeping? Is that so?"

"It is so," was muttered again by all present in a low chorus.

"Then our present numbers are nine thousand men in St. Petersburg, seven thousand at Moscow, five thousand at Smolensko, three thousand at Kief, and one thousand at Nidji-Novogorod. I am counting roughly in round numbers, remember. Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Right!" was the response, without a single dissentient voice.

"Brethren," continued Reyloff, "we are at length strong enough to strike. By a strange string of circumstances I find myself to-night your leader."

"Where are Carmiloff and Dronski?" demanded a voice.

"Absent on the business of the League; but I speak with their authority. Behold!" and he drew from an inside pocket a small red ivory hand, and held it up before the eyes of the conclave.

It evoked no answer, but everyone bowed his head in silence.

"Brethren," said Reyloff, "the perpetrators of the terrible deeds that you have related must fall beneath the knife. It is for us to pronounce sentence of death against them, and it is for the members of the various local lodges to carry out the decree. Now to more important matters. The Czar and the whole of the Imperial family must be destroyed at one swoop, and in their company some of the highest heads in the realm must also fall. It is all decided on, and I was to tell you so."

"And that devil incarnate the Minister of Police?" exclaimed some one.

"Will perish with the rest," answered Ivan Reyloff. "Hark ye, friends, it is I who conceived the plan, and it is on that account that I stand here to-night as a leader, and not as a subordinate—a speaker instead of a listener."

"The plan? Reveal it to us!" came a chorus of muffled yet eager voices.

"Monday next, as you are all aware, is the Czar's birthday, and to commemorate it a grand dinner is to be given at the Winter Palace. Two hundred guests are invited, and, of course, they are the highest and mightiest in the land. Prince Golgorouki, the Police Minister, will sit at the Czar's right hand. I need not particularize who else will be present.

"Now," continued Reyloff, "I am coming to the point. It is the custom on such occasions for a powerful gong to be struck, to insure grave silence whilst the Archbishop is saying grace. On the approaching occasion the boom of the gong, instead of being followed by the mumbling of a priest, will be the signal for an explosion that in an instant shall hurl all that brilliant assemblage into eternity. In the cellar beneath the banqueting hall, amidst a thousand casks of wine, there will be one of dynamite. It will be fired by electricity from a safe distance."

"And provided the plan succeeds, what then?" demanded some one.

"The dreaded Police Minister known to be dead, hundreds of

thousands of the for long down-trodden masses in St. Petersburg will arise against the *classes*, and slaughter their present tyrants. The old state of things will have passed away."

"And what is to come out of the chaos, Ivan Reyloff?" asked someone, a trifle superciliously.

"Freedom!" was the fiery retort. "Do you know what the French did on one occasion after they had freed themselves by a successful revolution? They crowned the most beautiful woman in Paris by the title of Goddess of Reason; yet, whilst they bowed down and worshipped at her shrine, they took good heed that the chains by which they bound themselves to her were of roses and not of iron, that her sway was as gentle as that of the Blessed Penagia herself, that she was, in fact, a puppet, whilst they who had placed her on her exalted pedestal, were in sober truth, hidden by her flowing draperies, the real rulers of the nation. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," answered all.

"Where is such a woman to be found?" asked one.

"In St. Petersburg," responded Reyloff, quickly. "She is young, beautiful, high-born and unfortunate. Her sore needs have made her the tool and slave of the Police Minister, who hates her for the sole reason that she resembles her mother, who once jilted him. He has this day decreed her death, accompanied by the most cruel tortures, as soon as she shall have successfully completed some infamous tasks that he has set her, which she dares not decline."

"Her name? Her name?" demanded several voices at once.

"Marie Catherine, Princess Olga," answered Reyloff.

"She herself is one of the accursed nobility," growled a Nihilist.

"She is an orphan, and even relationless, so she will have no connections to pop into sinecures, or train her thoughts to aim at more than it is expedient that she should be—an idol with no power in itself to help itself. Secondly, she is beautiful, *most* beautiful, and also vain enough of her charms to accept of admiration as sufficient tribute, and to pose in any character before her worshippers; and, thirdly, her condition is so desperate, although as yet she knows it not, that she will willingly be elected Queen of the Mob, rather than bow her beautiful head to King Knout. In short, the Princess Olga will make a superb butterfly emblem of our new Republic, whilst we, the working bees, gather honey to fill our own hives with. History has generally shown the ingratitude of male presidents towards the friends who have raised them over their own shoulders to be heads of a Republic; but a woman would feel too weak to rule alone, and would not dare to kick away the ladder by which she had mounted to her sovereignty. In the present instance *we* are that ladder."

The stern, unemotional Nihilists seemed to be swayed and convinced by his words.

Sundry other business formalities were next gone through, and then, giving his fellow-conspirators a strict injunction that what had been discussed during the evening was not even to be hinted at when they had once passed forth from their place of rendezvous, Reyloff made a sign that the Council stood adjourned.

Then one by one, at short intervals apart, the conspirators took their departure, and Ivan Reyloff was the last to ascend the step-ladder, creep up through the trap-door, push his way between the many sacks, and eventually lounge out of the shop into the street.

But, as he walked slowly and thoughtfully homewards, he more than once muttered to himself—

"If, through my scheming, that girl Princess rules Russia, it will not be before she has secretly married me."

CHAPTER XIX.

"I WAS YOUR NURSE WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD."

We must now turn from those who, from a cellar beneath a coal store, aspired to a palace, to those who, on slender enough tenure, occupied one.

Poor Marie Catherine, Princess Olga, when, humbled and humiliated, she picked herself up from the carpet whereon the brutal Police Minister had felled her, had but one consolation to solace herself with. He had made no inquiries concerning Ada Bayard, and, therefore, she concluded, had not the slightest suspicion that it was she who had helped her to escape from the Police Bureau, and afforded her the shelter of her roof.

As the reader, however, is aware, Prince Golgorouki, within two hours of her flight from his palace, not only knew of Ada Bayard's escape but also where she was harboured.

His keenly trained wit at once suggested to him the manner in which she had flown, and who had assisted her, and then he fully understood the sham fainting fit of the Princess, and shrewdly guessed the reason of her conduct.

"She thinks to outwit me," chuckled the Police Minister to himself, as he considered the affair in all its bearings. "She believes that in Ada Bayard she has a trump card which, when played, will ruin me with the Czar, and insure my disgrace and fall from power. Well, let her believe so. She may hug the comforting illusion to her heart until she has performed the work that no other woman in St. Petersburg is young, beautiful, high-born, and innocent looking enough to carry through successfully, and then I will force that card out of her hand, gloat over her helplessness, and punish her for daring to intrigue against me with *death by the knout.*"

The brute chuckled to himself again as he recalled to mind the scene in the Princess' brilliantly lighted drawing room, when, at the very moment she had deemed her superb loveliness triumphant he had felled her to the floor. He could even seem again to feel the thud of his fist against her yielding flesh, and again to see her upward look of horror, despair, and agony, as she

writhed on the rich carpet like a beautiful but baleful serpent.

"I have kept my promise to her mother," he continued to mutter, *sotto voce*. "When she threw me over for a then wealthier man, she little imagined the height to which I was capable of raising myself. Ah, wounded pride is a rare incentive to exertion. It awakens ambition in a man's nature as nothing else can. Before she died she discovered what a mistake she had made. Ha, ha, ha! to think that she and her husband, and all her children save one, should have perished of the floury typhus, introduced into her palace, I alone know why and how; and now there is only one of the race left for me to war against. When she was dying I told her that I would show no pity to a single one of her and that man's children. Marie, the youngest, alone survives, and lest the heritage of her mother's beauty should vanquish me, kind nature has given to her her father's eyes. Had they not flashed with triumph into my own to-night, as I saw his flash upon me the morning that he was wedded to the girl I loved, I might not have struck her down."

But we will leave the miserable, though all-powerful man, to his bitter reflections—reflections which prove that his heart was once human, and return to her for whom so many were endeavouring to create a destiny.

The Princess Olga, when she suffered Ada, in her new capacity as her maid, to unrobe her for the night, studiously concealed from her view the purple bruise where the fist of the Police Minister had struck her.

Poor Ada did not find her very amiable—quite the reverse, in fact.

"I begin to fear that you already regret having befriended me," she said; "oh! if you are fearful that harm to yourself may come of it, let me go forth from your palace, even at this hour. The Neva will, at all events, offer me a refuge."

"The Neva has locked up its front door for five long months," laughed the Princess, "added to which, ere you had been in the streets five minutes, at this time of the night, you would find yourself in the hands of the police. Know you not that the Czar is *our father* as well as our Emperor? I assure you he takes quite a paternal care of all his subjects—or, at least, such is one of the articles of our faith."

The mention of the word "father" alone precluded poor Ada from making any answer to this speech, for she immediately thought of the loss of her own kind and indulgent parent, and for the fiftieth time within the last few hours she burst into a passionate fit of sobbing that she was perfectly powerless to control.

Had she been herself in better spirits the Princess might have availed herself of this opportunity to torment her *protégée*, and rip her wounds as wide open as possible, but since she felt as miserable as she could do, she permitted herself to be put to bed, and then made Ada, notwithstanding the anguish of her feelings, read her to sleep with a light French novel.

* * * *

Day succeeded day, and Ada's grief gave way to the gentle influence of time. Perhaps, indeed, the life she led at the Olga Palace was one best calculated in every way to effect this object, though the Princess intended it to have quite an opposite effect.

Every petty persecution that she could invent she visited upon the poor girl.

She called her names, she beat her; at whatever hour she woke up in

the night she aroused Ada, who slept in her dressing room, to get up and read aloud, and that, perhaps, after she had been kept up awaiting her capricious young mistress' return from some ball or *fête* until the small hours of the morning.

But gratitude enabled the fair English girl to bear all this and even more.

Her deepest grief, indeed, was that she failed to please the brilliant young Russian beauty, who, she conceived, had incurred such danger in serving her, so that Ada was never weary of attempting an impossible task.

The Princess guessed the amiable feelings that swayed her victim, and became more tyrannical in her manner and more vindictive in her conduct than ever.

But these petty persecutions failed in their primary object of dimming the brightness of the English girl's eyes, of destroying the delicate bloom of her cheeks, or the exquisite contour of her form. The Princess' slipper heel or fan handle might bruise her victim's snowy shoulders, but the discoloration could not last for very long.

A trial was, however, approaching, that would surpass all others.

One day Sir Harry Gordon was announced, and the Princess, turning a look of triumph on Ada, said, "I knew that directly the dear fellow was well enough to go out he would pay his first visit to me. Now, I cannot permit you to enter his presence, for I will not risk the danger of anyone knowing that you are here, remember that; but if you wish to see how your old acquaintance looks, after all that he has gone through, I will not, for once, consider it dishonourable your making free use of a keyhole," and the Princess glided laughingly out of the room.

Poor Ada would have declined this humiliating concession had she been able, but the longing desire to look upon one whom she fondly loved, and who she believed loved her just as devotedly in turn—whose face and voice, moreover, would remind her so forcibly of her dear native land, of her aunt's, of the silvery Thames, of charming and romantic Richmond, of, in fact, a thousand bright reminiscences and joys gone, perhaps, for ever, all induced her (compelled her would be the better word) to make use of the keyhole, as the Princess had sneeringly told her that she might do.

Better for her happiness had her pride held sterner sway, for the keyholes of Russian doors are enormous, and Ada could see the whole of the inner drawing room in which Sir Harry and the Princess sat.

The young *attaché* looked very well, all things considered. He was evidently on the highway to speedy and complete recovery.

But, oh! how it stung her to the very soul to see him so bright and joyous of mien whilst her father lay dead, and she was the guest of the stranger—helpless, friendless, and hiding away for fear of her very life—for she knew fully now, thanks to the Princess, not only the awful crime wherewith she was charged, but also every tittle of the damning array of evidence that had been marshalled against her; and she had been often enough told by her that if discovered by the police and torn away from the Olga Palace, her choice would lie between the arms of the Police Minister and secret poisoning when he tired of her, or death 'neath the cruel knout in the open police yard.

Oh! how *could* Harry laugh and chat with her protectress, as if he had not a care or a sorrow? His

manner seemed *more* than friendly towards her—it was closely familiar, to say the least. Had she been his very *sister* he could not have been more at home with the young Princess.

It seemed very strange to Ada, who had been accustomed all her life to the cold, formal etiquette of English society.

It never struck her that a man of the world has to suit his conduct to the manners and customs of whatever people he happens to dwell amongst.

To Ada her lover's conduct was atrocious, and that even though her blackest impression was that he was as free with the Princess as though he had been her *brother*.

Wherefore, with her eyes dimmed by scalding tears, she at last hurried back to her bedroom, where the first silly and impetuous act that she committed was to tear from her neck a locket which contained his portrait and hair, and toss it contemptuously into the stove.

"He *does* love her," she murmured to herself, bitterly. "She spoke but the simple truth when she said so. And yet who can wonder at it? She is more lovely than I am; often I feel sure of that. And then she is a princess, too. Oh, God, he need not have forgotten me so wholly, though; now, now especially, when I am so forlorn, so friendless, so surrounded by peril. Ah! no one—no one loves me!"

"Do not think that, dear Miss Ada, for *I* love you. And have you never heard the fable of the little mouse who set the lion free?"

These words were spoken in broken English, yet in very sweet though sad tones; and Ada, looking round, beheld a middle-aged woman bending over her as she lay on a sofa, her face just raised from being buried in the cushions, whilst tears bedewed her cheeks and sobs almost choked her utterance.

The woman's face was a kindly and pleasant one, albeit that her features were decidedly Russian, and that her picturesque costume savoured of the same country.

"Who are you?" asked Ada, "that speak to me so softly and so kindly?"

"I was your nurse when you were a child. Your mother both loved and valued me."

"Oh, then, *I* will love and value you, also, for I now know that you must be good and kind," sobbed Ada, and, springing to her feet, she threw herself into Baba's arms.

CHAPTER XX.

"WHO MURDERED MY FATHER'S TRIED AND HIGHLY VALUED SERVANT?"

MEANWHILE, the young *attaché* continued to sit and chat with the lovely and volatile Princess, by no means insensible to her beauty or to the charm of her society, but yet as loyal, even in thought, to the one sole love of his life as it was possible for a *man* to be.

Had Ada but given herself time to seriously reflect, she would have seen nothing at all heartless, or even singular, in his conduct; for her dead father the young *attaché* had only once beheld and never spoken to. And, as regarded herself, he was under the impression that she was by now back in free and happy England, and that very morning he had mailed a letter to her there, addressed to her aunt's house at Fulham, breathing earnest hopes of shortly returning home in order to claim her hand in marriage.

Yes, he had come to the conclusion that the lady whom he had beheld passing along the street in front of the palace of the British Embassy must have been someone else, and that Ada was in a land where the first week in March is not mid-winter, but early spring.

The Princess Olga, with all her *verve*, coquetry, and tact, could not extort from him any intelligence that might be prejudicial to British interests in the East or elsewhere; though in her sparkling conversation, which sounded as innocent as the prattle of a child, she tried her very hardest to do so.

Sir Harry talked freely and cleverly on all other matters, but when the conversation turned on politics he rapidly, though always gracefully, managed, in some way or other, to change the subject.

At last he rose and bade the Princess farewell, again thanking her for the kind interest she had shown in his health.

But when he had quitted the palace and re-entered his sleigh it suddenly struck him that the morrow was the day fixed upon for the English shipbuilder's funeral, and that, as the affianced husband of his only child, it might show a want of proper feeling and respect on his part not to pay a visit to the body as it lay in state.

For a later command of the young Czar had decreed that the corpse of his faithful servant should lie in state as well as be given a grand public funeral.

He knew that a powerful navy had been the late Emperor's hobby, and though, only a dozen years previously, it had been knocked out of existence by England's hearts-of-oak, yet that had not been the fault of the ships, but of the officers who commanded and the sailors who had manned them, and Mr. Bayard was responsible for neither one nor the other. To the end the Emperor Nicholas had called him *the Father of his Navy*, and almost to the last day of his life he had mentioned the English shipbuilder's name kindly.

Assuredly had the then Czar Alexander been but able to rule through ministers as kindly hearted and as inflexibly just as himself, he would have ruled benignly and well. It may be truly said of him that he had never countenanced an evil thing, nor commanded a cruel one; and yet what infamous atrocities had been committed in his name!

When Sir Harry Gordon reached the shipbuilder's house on the Inglis-kaia Nabarejenia he found the front door veiled with a heavy curtain of black cloth, and a man standing on each side of it, dressed not unlike an English mute.

A thin sprinkling of people was passing in and out, the majority, by their careless and unconcerned manner, evidently attracted by curiosity alone.

Sir Harry alighted from his sleigh, and, following the ingoers, presently found himself in the very apartment wherein the body lay.

The corpse was stretched out in its coffin, which was placed in the centre of the large, old fashioned four-poster bedstead, with the lid lying beside it.

It was arrayed in a new suit of black cloth, and the hands, which were joined upon the breast, clasped a small painted picture of the Redeemer.

Around the brow of the deceased was bound a broad blue ribbon, with angels wrought upon it in silver; at the head of the coffin was fixed a cross (not a crucifix), and around the bedstead burned six tall candles in great gilded candlesticks, whilst close by stood a little round table, whereon was a plate of rice, surrounded by pieces of lump sugar, and having a cross formed of raisins in its centre.

The coffin itself, which had doubtless been bought ready made at the grocer's, along with the confections —for in St. Petersburg coffins of all kinds, sizes and qualities, are openly exposed for sale in the shops—was covered with brown velvet, by reason that the deceased was a widower. Had his wife been alive the colour would have been crimson, and in case of children or very young people rose pink is always the hue.

At the foot of the bed knelt two long bearded priests, clad in black vestments, and chanting the hymn of the Aspasmus or Last Embrace.

They took no notice of those who came in or those who passed out, but continued their sonorous drone as though they alone occupied the chamber of death.

Their voices rose almost to a howl at the more solemn parts of the dirge.

"*Come hither, O ye descendants of Adam! and see humbled unto dust, a man resembling ourselves, divested of all comeliness, and soon to be consumed in the grave, to moulder away in pitchy darkness, to be devoured by the worms. Approach, ye onlookers, and, weeping, worship God!*"

Such was the tenor of their chant, and the young *attaché*, as he gazed awe-stricken at the solemn and mournful spectacle, could not but be thankful that Ada, far distant in sunny England, as he conceived her to be, was spared the cruel and soul harrowing spectacle.

And yet it was very sad to think that the old man, an alien from his home and kindred, had been decked and tricked out after death in this foreign land (for what Sir Harry couldn't regard as anything better than a raree show) by stranger hands, the majority of them no doubt those of the police.

To Sir Harry the whole proceeding savoured more of sacrilege than of the high honour that it was intended to be.

Whilst he thus reflected, Prince Golgorouki entered the room, gazed

at the corpse, started, and hurriedly quitted it again.

A few minutes later he returned again with half a dozen grey great-coated, helmeted policemen at his heels.

"Put on the lid, and screw it down," said he, and then he again took his departure.

The police began to set to work (for the genus undertaker and his myrmidons seem to be unknown in Russia), and as they lifted the lid and placed it over the corpse, the monotonous chant of the priests still continued with:—

"*What lamentation and wailing and mourning when the soul is separated from the body. Hell and perdition are then disclosed. Human life seems altogether vanity; a transient shadow; the sleep of error. We have taken our last look upon the deceased, so now let us meditate on our own latter end. Like a thin vapour rising from the earth he vanished; like grass he was cut down; arrayed in perishing apparel he is to be laid in the dust. His eyes are closed, his feet are bound, his hands are at rest—yea, his very sense of hearing is extinct, and his tongue is locked up in silence. All are delivered up to the grave, all human things are vain; so repent ye, and serve God whilst there is yet time.*"

The priests had arrived at this point of the doleful yet beautiful chant when the ring of spurs was heard ascending the staircase, and within the chamber of death every knee was bowed, as there entered, to the surprise of everyone present, the Emperor Alexander.

He carried in his hands a small velvet cushion, fringed with gold, and on it lay the glittering decoration of St. Vladimir, the highest order of merit (non-military) in the Russian Empire.

The Czar seemed somewhat surprised at seeing the body covered up, for during the sway of a Russian winter there is no need of hasty sepulchre, since a corpse would keep fresh above ground from the beginning of October to the end of March.

He motioned to the police to remove the coffin lid again, which, as they had not even commenced to screw it down, was an easy task.

When the dead man was revealed to view, the Emperor placed the cushion and the glittering order on his breast, exclaiming as he did so,—

"Thus, I am assured, would my father have acted, had he lived to see this day. God grant that his son may ever possess such a faithful and devoted servant," and he motioned for the coffin lid to be put on again.

Before the men could comply, however, the eagle eye of the Czar observed something in the dead man's appearance which caused him to start, much in the manner the Police Minister had done.

The nostrils, and a portion of the upper lip of the deceased, he observed, had turned to a pale, greenish hue.

"Golgorouki! Where is Prince Golgorouki?" exclaimed the Emperor, signing to the men to leave the coffin lid where it was.

"Here, your Majesty," answered the Police Minister, as he came forward from amongst the group of glittering officers, who had followed the sovereign only so far as the adjoining room. "Here, always at your Majesty's right hand."

The Czar took him by the sleeve.

"What make you of *that?*" he asked.

"It is one of the few riddles that even *I* cannot solve," replied the Police Minister, calmly. "I was fearful that your Majesty might think it the progress of corruption,

and to prevent you from being shocked I ordered the lid to be put on."

"And how did you know, Prince, that I purposed this visit?"

"Because it is my duty, as head of the police, to know everything, Sire."

"Then you must have also known that I intended to decorate the corpse?"

"Your Majesty, I did not inform myself on that point."

"Then, Golgorouki, I will tell you of another point that you must inform yourself on—namely, who *murdered* my father's tried and highly valued servant? Don't attempt to convince me to the contrary, for it would be useless. My uncle Constantine died suddenly, and there was that same green mark about *his* nostrils after death; my grandfather, the Emperor Alexander, died suddenly, and there was that same greenness upon *his* upper lip. I have heard that it was also so with my illustrious ancestor, Peter the Great, and with his grandson, my own great-uncle. Golgorouki, the murderer of Mr. Bayard must and *shall* be discovered. Fail me not in this, for remember it is *the command of the Czar!*"

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE COMMAND OF THE CZAR IS LAW!"

For a full minute after the Emperor had thus delivered himself, no sound was to be heard in the chamber of death save the monotonous chant of the two priests, whom the entrance of the Czar, and all that had subsequently occurred, had not disturbed one whit in their religious exercises.

"*Every wicked connection with life and vanity is dissolved. The spirit hath forsaken her earthly lodging, the clay is disfigured, the vessel broke. We carry a motionless and insensible corpse to the grave, entreating the Lord to grant him eternal rest, and to forgive the sins of his soul.*"

Thus ran the plaintive burthen of their chant, whilst the great candles fluttered and flickered in the artificially darkened room, sometimes causing the dead to look as though he smiled; and the brilliant uniform and gilded helmet of the young Emperor, the bullion epaulettes of the Police Minister, the silver-embroidered copes of the kneeling priests, the diamonds and rubies in the star of St. Vladimir that lay so still on the sunk-in chest of the corpse, all flashed and glittered in the pale, yellow, unearthly looking light.

At length Prince Golgorouki, a cold, snake-like gleam in his cunning grey eyes, said, with a submissive bow, and in deep, impressive tones —"Sire, the command of the Czar is the law of his slaves. The murderer *shall* be discovered. Though he may ere this have fled to the uttermost end of the earth he shall not escape the consequences of his crime."

"Let it be so," answered the Czar, curtly. "But, hark ye, Golgorouki, his capture and his punishment will not suffice. I must know the nature of the poison that has proved so deadly to many of my illustrious ancestors, and which, if I fail to put myself on my guard against it, may, one day, in like manner, prove fatal to me. Even as a boy I often wondered at the sudden and mysterious deaths of so many of the rulers of Russia, and consequently from my youth upward, I have studied the laws and actions of poisons with greedy and impatient zeal. The one which has been so disastrous to my race has always baffled and eluded me. Golgorouki, it must do so no longer."

"Sire, if it *be* a poison, you shall know its name, its action, its component parts, its every aspect, and its *antidote*, within a week from the present time," said the Police Minister, with another cringing bow.

"It is well," replied the Czar, half dreamily, half sadly. "Golgorouki, I believe that thou art a true and faithful servant. When a very few years ago I began to reign I had faith in all men, and—and—and even now I still believe in *thee*. Those who are implicitly trusted, seldom deceive, 'tis said."

"When they do they should incur the direct wrath of God and of man

as well. Your Majesty's government has not a punishment severe enough for the wretch who would dare to deceive a monarch who had confided in him."

"Well, Golgorouki, I look to you as a man of action more than as a man of words. From this moment let those actions bespeak your zeal to please me."

And, without waiting for an answer he turned round to leave the room.

He had already made a few steps towards the door, when his keen glance suddenly remarked the pale and perturbed face of the young English *attaché*, pallid more from horror than from weakness and lassitude.

"Ah," said the Czar, "who are you? An English gentleman, if I mistake not? I fancied that poor Bayard had outlived the memory of his countrymen."

"I have the honour of being the affianced husband of his only daughter, Sire."

"A sweetly pretty girl, with eyes, hair, form and complexion that no land on earth, save your own favoured isle can produce. Is it not so? I have her likeness in my possession. Nay, do not look surprised. I can assure you that I became possessed of it in a perfectly legitimate manner. Her poor father brought it with him the last time that he ever visited the palace. But you look faint, ill—this scene is too much for you."

"Yes, Sire; for I have not yet quite recovered from my wound."

"Wound! What wound? Ah, pardon my forgetfulness and apparently base ingratitude. I now recognize you as the young British officer, who, at the hazard of his life, attempted the other night to capture my cowardly assailant. Had you been in uniform instead of in mufti, I had known you in an instant. I had thought of looking you up a score of times, but some obstacle or other has always prevented me. I must thank you now, and with all my heart, for the service you rendered me. The man whom you so nearly captured was doubtless the accomplice of the woman who fired the revolver. He must have been an arrant coward not to have undertaken the dangerous work himself."

"*Woman*, Sire?" exclaimed Sir Harry. "This is the first that I've heard about a woman being mixed up with the affair. Your Majesty must surely be mistaken!"

"No, no, indeed I am not. It was really a woman who fired three charges of a revolver at me. One of the new revolutionary sect who call themselves Nihilists, Golgorouki says. Poor creature, no doubt she acted under compulsion, for which reason I have ordered that when she is arrested, she shall be imprisoned for life in the island fortress of Schlusselberg, more in the character of a dangerous lunatic than as a State criminal."

"But, your Majesty, I am *sure* that you have been deceived, unintentionally, of course, yet deceived, nevertheless. Why, Miss Bayard and I were seated in the box next to the one from whence the shots were fired. I instantly rushed forth from our own to enter the adjoining one, and arrest the miscreant. As I gained the corridor I saw him slinking out. I gave chase, and should have captured him, had he not carried a dagger up his sleeve."

"Permit me to ask if you *looked* into the adjoining box ere you pursued the runaway?" demanded the calm, icy voice of the Police Minister.

"Certainly not. It would have been useless, and I should have lost valuable time."

"Yet it prevented you from

ascertaining whether there was a woman there or not."

"In a legal sense, perhaps, yet I am morally certain that there was no woman there."

"My dear sir, moral certainty is no certainty at all in Russia. Why, I have on record the words of treasonable conversation she held with her male companion ere she perpetrated the abominable deed."

"It is very odd that neither I nor Miss Bayard should have heard voices in the adjoining box."

"Doubtless the *spectacle* engrossed all your thoughts. That was natural."

"But it did *not*. Our wits, I assure you, were very much about us."

Prince Golgorouki shrugged his shoulders. What more could he do?

"Tell this gentleman a portion of the conversation between the conspirators."

This from the Emperor, which caused the Police Minister to feel uneasy.

"Really, your Majesty, I cannot recall a single word of it to mind at the present moment."

"Did not the woman say that she would emulate Charlotte Corday, and rid Russia of a tyrant by discharging a pistol at even an emperor's breast, or words to that effect? You were very pat with the entire conversation the other day."

It was now Sir Harry's turn to conceal his agitation by a powerful effort. He remembered that it was *Ada* who had spoken to him somewhat in this fashion, ay, if not those very words.

"Good God!" thought he to himself, "can suspicion have fallen upon *her*? If so, how fortunate it is that she is no longer in this police-ridden country. Not, surely, but what the Czar would allow my testimony to exonerate her, with my wound, got in his service, to back it up, and yet there is no knowing, with such a Police Minister."

Now, the aforesaid Police Minister was all this while thinking—"Through this fool's gabble my power over Ada Bayard is slipping through my fingers. At all risks I must prevent any further explanation." So he said:—

"Sire, my duties are so multifarious and onerous that my remembrance of conversations frequently fails me. I don't think, either, that your Majesty's memory is quite accurate in the present instance. Be it so or no, the police of Russia do not err, and within a few days the walls of your Majesty's island fortress of Schusselberg shall hold the daring rebel, who seems to have forgotten her sex along with her fealty."

"Good. One day I will see and have speech with her there," answered the Czar. "But her male accomplice—has *he* been yet arrested, Golgorouki?"

"Sire, he was assassinated, for some reason or other, by his fellow-conspirators."

"Assassinated! What, because he had failed to carry out their fell design?"

"Your Majesty, it is hard to get at the motives of these Nihilists. His corpse, lashed and bound as to arms and legs, and with a gag in its mouth, was fished out of a hole in the ice of the Neva at an early hour this morning."

"If I saw it," exclaimed Sir Harry, "I could swear to the villain amongst a thousand."

"Hardly," answered the Police Minister, drily. "His face had been entirely eaten away by the fishes."

"Come, enough of this," exclaimed the Emperor, with a shudder, "we

seem to be lunching on horrors. Sir Harry Gordon, once more accept my heartfelt thanks for the service which you endeavoured to render me at such imminent hazard to yourself, and remember that if ever you have an occasion to ask a favour of me, to demand it fearlessly, for whatever it is it shall be granted."

Then grasping the Englishman by the hand, the Czar wrung it fervently, strode out of the room, and, accompanied by Prince Golgorouki and the officers of his retinue, descended the staircase and passed out into the street.

The young *attaché* also quickly quitted the chamber of death, wondering, vaguely as yet, about all that he had just heard and seen.

As he passed out of the house the hoarse chant of the priests for the last time smote upon his ear with :—

"*When the spirit is ravished from the body by awful angels, kindred and acquaintances are all forgot; the future judgment alone engageth attention, the vain pursuits and fruitless labours of the flesh are then at an end. Supplicating the Great Judge, let us beseech Him to forgive the sins of the departed. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for this poor sinner now, at the hour of his greatest trial, and ask thy dear Son to grant repose to his soul.*"

A minute later, with a gasp of fervent relief and thankfulness, Sir Harry was out in the clear bright sunshine of the snow-laden streets.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE BLACK COACH SHALL BE AT HAND IN CASE OF SUDDEN EMERGENCY."

THOUGH Sir Harry Gordon was filled with many distressing and soul-harrowing thoughts as, in his well appointed sleigh, he dashed over the crisp snow towards the Embassy, they were as nothing compared with those that tortured the breast of the cruel and unscrupulous Minister of Police.

The visit of the Czar to the dead shipbuilder, and the discovery which he had made there, were bad enough in themselves, but the danger of the situation was much enhanced in the Prince's mind by the Emperor's interview with the English *attaché*, and the half-explanation that had resulted therefrom.

"Who would have thought that the meddling fool would have been about so soon, and have turned up just where he was least wanted; especially after the hint I gave Dr. Reyski to invalid him home to England the very instant that he could bear the journey. 'Tis very evident that the doctor either disregarded my instructions or that the young man declined to take his advice, and now the Czar has as good as given him the run of the palace; and furthermore promised to grant him the first favour that he may be prompted to ask.

"Confound it all—(so continued the current of the Prince's thoughts) —the edifice which I have so carefully upreared in order to insure this lovely girl falling my victim is all crumbling down around my ears. First of all, Madame my Princess, in her infernal jealousy, makes my palace too hot to hold her, and she takes refuge with a woman whom, of all her sex, I had the least wish to give the slightest power over me. Happily, she trembles at my frown, and deems me more powerful than I even am. Great heavens, if she only knew that by taking the English girl to the Winter Palace, and recounting to the Czar the story of her wrongs, she would ruin me irretrievably, and perhaps even make the Emperor believe that 'twas I who poisoned her father; wouldn't she delight to do it! Would she, I wonder, have the courage? Ha!—I will not give her the chance. My agents shall from this moment surround her palace night and day; and the Black Coach shall also be at hand, in case a sudden emergency arises."

At this juncture a seeming peasant made a secret sign to the Police Minister that he wished to communicate with him, and the Prince ordered his ischvostchick to rein up his coal-black, silver-decorated steeds."

The man came up, cringing and fawning, and bending almost double at every step—for it is astonishing how supple a police-ridden despotism renders the backbones of all its subjects.

"Well," said the Prince, shortly and sharply, "well, what is it?"

"Your highness wished all

visitors to the Olga Palace to be reported—"

"Do not tell me what I already know—to the point, man, to the point."

"Your highness, a young officer of the British Embassy was a visitor there for more than an hour this morning—his name is Gordon."

"Good; here is a fistful of copecs—watch till your relief comes. Drive on."

"This is strange" (soliloquized the Police Minister again). "Had it been Harcourt, or Cyril, or Montagu, I should have seen nothing in it, but for Gordon to pay his first call at the Princess's after recovery from his wound—he an engaged man too—I can't make it out at all. Can it be that they are *en rapport*, and that to avenge herself on me the Princess would do anything so thoroughly distasteful to her as to help on the course of true love, instead of trying her hardest to make the man a traitor to his first allegiance, and break a rival's heart? I can scarcely believe it of her; and yet what is not such a creature capable of?"

Presently he shouted out to his ischvostchick—"The Olga Palace,"

In an instant the sleigh was turning in its direction and proceeding thitherward with lightning speed on its bright steel runners, the horses' breath floating like a cloud in advance, and the icy air laden with those little shining darts, or *spiculæ*, that on a very cold day make the Russian atmosphere look as if it was full of floating particles of quinine.

The Police Minister laughed but once on his way thither, and it was at beholding two peasants meet and, after saluting each other on either cheek, vainly attempt to separate, by reason of their beards having frozen tightly together during the momentary embrace. He had witnessed such a sight often, but it was the first time during the present winter.

"I must put an end to this," he went on reflecting. "The time has come when I must choose between the indulgence of my passions and a regard for my personal safety. Could I but have got that old shipbuilder underground, and the young *attaché* either similarly disposed of or beyond the confines of the empire, I could have safely seized upon both girls, and having lashed the one to death, have felt myself secure with the other. But matters are all happening on the cross, as the vulgar express it, and so the time for trifling is evidently over. Ha, I have it! I will bribe the Princess Olga to poison the English girl, and when she is dead, I will have her body discovered in her house and she shall be arrested and punished for the crime. Let me see, can I not saddle her with the old man's death also? A young and beautiful Lucretia Borgia, or Marquise de Braglione, would make a most pleasing scandal for St. Petersburg society."

The idea seemed to amuse him, for his grim features relaxed into a smile.

Five minutes later the sleigh was drawn up in front of the Olga Palace, and the Police Minister, still smiling, got out and passed across the snow into the deep gloom of the frowning *porte cochere*.

* * * *

Return we to Ada Bayard, whom we left two chapters ago clasped in the arms of the woman who had once been her mother's faithful servant.

Strange, to say, in a single minute's acquaintance, Ada felt that she had at last found a truer friend than any whom she had en-

countered in Russia, even though Baba had as yet bestowed on her naught but a few kindly words, whilst the Princess had run grave personal risks to serve her, hazarding her life thereby.

"You are in dire trouble," said Baba. "How did the Princess get you in her power?"

"In her power!" answered Ada in surprise. "She is my friend and protectress!"

"Do you mean to say that you are here of your own free will?"

"Yes, and she saved me from, oh! you do not know how terrible a fate."

"Can it be? Well, I am pleased to hear that she is a better woman than I thought her."

"Yes, Baba, she preserved me from becoming the prey of Prince Golgorouki."

"That is passing strange, considering she is a spy and tool of the Police Minister."

"Oh, Baba, you should not speak so uncharitably of one whose bread you eat."

"I speak as I have found, my dear. A more cruel or a more heartless mistress I never possessed. Until now I have not thought her capable of a single good or generous action. Do *you* really find her kind and amiable?"

"I think—that—*sometimes* she may regret having incurred so much danger on my account, and upon such occasions she is—perhaps—a little brusque and abrupt with me. But I must put her noble actions in the scale against her empty words, and then *they* will seem trifles indeed."

"Ah, you have your mother's generous heart. Pray heaven that the Princess may have rescued you from the Police Minister and brought you hither for a good motive. She has certainly made you look very different from what you did, and so far so good. I'd never have thought 'twas you hadn't I known that you were in the house. Well, Miss Ada, be she true or false, Baba will try to stand your friend. She will watch over you as well as she is able, and if the worst comes to the worst—but there, we won't think of that."

"Yes, we will, dear Baba. Tell me, what if the worst does come to the worst?"

"We will flee from this wicked city. We will go forth at night and crouch, and creep, and glide until we reach the Neva. Then we will follow it to its mouth, and skate across the frozen gulf to the coast of Finland. I don't know how far it is, and I don't know the way; but God will show it us, and guard us from wolves and bears and ice-floes on the road."

"Oh, Baba, we will surely not be driven to such dire extremity as that? The Princess *must* be good at heart, or she would never have done for me what she has. If she is hasty and passionate, we should pity rather than blame her."

"We—we *will* pity her—whilst we *can*," answered Baba, half inclined to tell Ada more about the Princess, in order to place her thoroughly on her guard, yet, at the same time, shrinking from doing so, lest she should unduly terrify her, and so increase her mental torture.

"Yes, yes, that will be the better way," she added, as the latter feeling prevailed. "But trust her not too far, and let her persuade you to take no important step until you have first consulted me in secret. I must go now, for it would not please her highness to find us together; but I will watch over your safety to the best of my ability, though it may not be prudent for us often to meet. Good-bye, good-bye. Were your poor mother alive she would approve of what I am now doing, and also of

what I intend to do, for the protection of her darling."

These words caused Ada Bayard to fling herself into Baba's arms afresh, but at this unfortunate juncture a door between the two rooms opened, and in an instant the velvet-footed Princess was a spectator of the scene.

"Ha! quite a poetical grouping," she said, showing her white teeth in a spiteful and malignant smile. "So you have kisses for my serf, but only words of unmeaning gratitude for me. 'Tis no wonder that people so seldom perform good actions if this is the kind of return they generally get."

"Baba was an old and faithful servant of my mother's, dear Princess," pleaded Ada.

"After that mother became a Russian subject, and not long before you were born, *ma mignon*; so she told me, or rather admitted, the other morning."

"Oh, Baba," ejaculated Ada, reproachfully, "this from you?"

"I assure you, dear Miss Ada," stammered Baba, "it was extor——"

"Silence, slave!" hissed the Princess, between her clinched teeth. "Silence, I say, or I will send you off at once to the police-yard and the whipping-post."

"Your highness, Prince Golgorouki wishes to see you immediately," gasped Lota, entering the room, pale and agitated, for nearly everyone in St. Petersburg trembled (even if they knew not why) at the proximity of the Police Minister.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"IT WAS NO PART OF OUR COMPACT THAT I SHOULD BECOME AN ASSASSIN!"

If the Princess had received a sudden and agonising death wound she could not have looked more distressed.

The hectic red of passion vanished from her cheeks, leaving them of an ashy whiteness. There came a wild expression of terror into her eyes, and she clasped both her little hands (the fingers of which sparkled with precious stones) over the region of her heart, as though to still its wild throbbing.

"Oh, your highness!" exclaimed Ada, throwing herself at the Princess' feet and embracing her round the hips, "if the danger threatens you it is on *my* head that it must fall. In your noble generosity and pity you have already gone through far too much on behalf of one who is a complete stranger to you. Let me go forth and deliver myself up."

"The very way to ruin me irretrievably, little fool," retorted the Princess, spitefully. "He would then have me beaten to death as the accomplice of a regicide. No, no, this visit has nothing to do with you. He doesn't even guess that you are here; but he struck me last night—struck me when I was in the full glory of my beauty, and so I'm wondering how I shall be able to restrain, in his presence, the tongue that else may whip off my head, as a common Russian proverb has it."

"Pray be careful, your highness—most careful. Oh, the man who could find the heart to strike you, of what enormity would he not be capable?" ejaculated Ada, as she covered the Princess' hands with kisses.

"You should have been a man, for you know how to flatter so well," rejoined the Princess. "Baba," she continued, "leave the room, nor dare to enter it again unless you are specially rung for"; and, disengaging herself from Ada's clasped arms, the Princess, hastily assuming the appearance of a courage that she did not feel, left the apartment at the heels of her serf.

* * * *

She expected to be upbraided by the great man for her tardy attendance; but, to her surprise, she found him all smiles and affability.

"Princess," said he, with a bow, "it was necessary, absolutely necessary, to show you one side of my character last night, for the Secret Police of Russia must be subservient to neither gold nor beauty, and you were offering an instance of gross insubordination, by endeavouring, as a mere subaltern, to obtain a power over your chief. Having conquered you, I can afford to be generous, and, as an instance of that generosity, I will forgive you an act which otherwise I should have made you dearly rue."

"I am unconscious of having

committed any such act," answered the Princess, gaining courage from the mildness of her terrible employer.

"Come, come, your highness, surely you have known me long enough by this time to be aware that nothing that takes place in St. Petersburg can escape my observation. For days I have been aware that Ada Bayard was an inmate of your palace. To convince you, I will, if you like, tell you how you showed her the means of secret exit from my bureau; and of her every adventure, from the time of her leaving the Foundling Hospital to that of her entry in at your gates. Does your incredulity *require* this waste of speech?"

"Oh, no, no, no," cried the Princess, sinking into a chair; "I own that I was guilty of the act. Pity for one so young, so beautiful, and so friendless—"

"Princess, actresses drop 'shop' in the green-room. They reserve rant for the stage."

"Your highness," gasped the Princess, "what mean you by that speech?"

"That it is worse than useless giving false motives for your actions to *me*. Pity! Ha, ha, ha! why, you were never guilty of such an emotion in your life. You helped the shipbuilder's daughter to escape from my clutches because you imagined that her secret possession would give you a certain power over me. Indeed, I should not wonder if you did long to persecute her a little on your own account. You are not given to love those who are more beautiful than yourself."

"In the first place, I deny that Ada Bayard *is* more beautiful than I am."

"I think I can safely declare that the majority of the opposite sex would think she was; but that's neither here nor there. She must die!"

"Die?" exclaimed the Princess, springing up from the chair into whose downy softness she had just sunk, as though under the influence of an electric shock. "Die, did you say? Oh, *that* is altogether too horrible!"

"I've something yet more horrible in the background. You must be her executioner. Now, make no idle excuses, for *I have willed it.*"

"*Man*, it was no part of our compact that I should become an assassin," gasped the Princess, under her breath, as she surveyed her tyrant with a look of unfeigned horror. "Besides," she added, "you must have loved this girl, or you would not have been at such pains to possess yourself of her; why, then, in heaven's name, do you now desire to kill her?"

"Because she has become too dangerous a prize to possess; because, for once in my life, I laid my plans too carelessly, and, as a consequence, have now to choose between the gratification of an idle whim and my personal safety. Whilst I was able to satisfy the Czar that she was the author of the attempt upon his life, I knew well enough what his answer would be. He would have said to me—'Golgorouki, if it is really necessary to punish the poor creature let her be confined for life in some secure place, where she can do no further harm. No knout, nor plet, but perpetual imprisonment only, and don't let me see her, lest I be weak enough to pardon her.' Those would have been almost his very words, and they would have given me unlimited control over the girl; but, as events have turned out, he has exchanged speech with the British officer who was fool enough to attempt to capture the would-be assassin, and the consequence is that the Emperor will now hardly believe

that a woman had anything to do with the deed, and when, by-and-by, a letter comes from England to this young fellow, stating that Ada Bayard has never reached its shores, he will call upon the Czar and remind him of a promise that he made him to-day: to grant one first request that he should ask, which will, of course, be to have the capital and its neighbourhood searched through and through for the wench; in short, such a stir will ere long assuredly be made about her, that under ground seems to be the only place where she is certain not to be found. Now you know why she must be killed."

"Oh, heaven! I should have thought that there were a dozen milder alternatives."

"Two dozen for that matter, but not one of them so safe and sure. The dead tell no tales, the banished may. I would not be so cautious, but that the Czar has discovered that her father was poisoned, and therefore his suspicions are already half aroused. If, added to this, he learns that the dead man's daughter is still in Russia, and remembers how I assured him she had returned to England, and, furthermore, manages to get speech with her, as he assuredly would do, how, after that, should I stand in his favour? He seems to have specially noticed her; he has her portrait even, how obtained heaven only knows. In fact, matters have persisted in turning out just contrary to what I wished, and so I repeat, she must die."

"Prince, I fear you are not half so sagacious as I have always thought you. I have imagined your machinations to be so clever that they could not possibly be defeated," said the Princess, gaining some courage from the thought.

"And so they always are when I am well served. In the present instance I was apprised of the Emperor's intended visit to the corpse of the shipbuilder too late; whilst the doctor, who should have prevented that cursed British *attaché* from quitting the Embassy, save for the railway station and the Berlin train, either accidentally or intentionally made a mess of his instructions."

"Do not blame *him* too quickly. The English are a very self-willed race."

"And very impressionable, too, it seems. This young man was at your palace a whole hour this morning. If I thought that you were in league with him—"

"He is simply one of those whose hearts I would like to win and then break as a punishment for their having been so long insensible to my charms."

"*His* ever will be. He absolutely dotes on this English girl. He told the Czar that she was his affianced wife," replied the Police Minister.

The Princess winced. She had imagined that that morning she had made some impression on the young *attaché* during his lengthy call.

"I fear that neither your fascination nor mine are invincible," she said, with an uneasy laugh. "I know for certain that the girl dotes on her English Adonis."

"Then why should our feelings towards either stand in the way of our self-interest?"

"I don't see, as far as the girl is concerned, how *my* self-interest is affected."

"Then listen whilst I inform your highness. It is by your fault that she is here. Were she still in my palace *my* hand should do the deed, but being in yours, it falls on you. This is the result of your meddling with matters that did not concern you—acting, as you must have known that you were doing, in thorough opposition to my wishes. I repeat, therefore, that Ada Bayard

must die by your hand, and also be buried at your expense."

"And what if I refuse to commit so awful a crime at your bidding?"

"Then the deed will be perpetrated all the same, and in lieu of the dead body being quietly buried out of the way you will be openly charged by me with the murder. *Now* do you clearly comprehend how matters stand?"

"Oh, but to accuse and to prove guilty are two widely different things. Where would be your evidence against me?" exclaimed the Princess, in an undertone.

"Why, every servant whom you possess is in my pay," laughed the Prince.

"Not if I over bribe them, monster. Then they will naturally be true to me."

"And what could *your* purse effect, even though I keep it tolerably well filled? A seventh part of the taxes that are wrung from the entire population of Russia passes through my hands to be doled out to my myrmidons, and exhausted in the various exigencies of the Secret Police. My purse is therefore bottomless. You need not beat your wings against the net that incloses you, for you will only bruise and injure them, and not destroy one of the meshes—that I can assure you."

"Cruel and ruthless man, would that I had accepted beggary rather than your alliance."

"Well, it might certainly have been a wise choice, as far as you yourself are concerned. She who sups with the devil should use a long spoon—you know the proverb. But come, is it to be one or two? Ada Bayard must perish; you need not, unless you feel so inclined. By sacrificing her you can save yourself. Answer me."

"I will do your bidding then," said the Princess, with a shudder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I KNOW NOT WHY, BUT I BOTH DETEST AND FEAR THAT WOMAN."

"A RIGHT sensible decision," remarked Prince Golgorouki, after a moment's pause. "And now for the ways and means. It is but right and proper that you should have a vote on that subject. Shall it be the dagger or the bowl?"

"For pity's sake, talk not lightly of so horrible a matter. Dozens of times I have felt as though I should like to kill her—ay, torture her in addition—for daring to be more lovely and loved than I am. But now—"

"With the usual inconsistency of woman you begin to experience exactly the opposite desire, I suppose," queried the Police Minister, with a sneer. "But what is to be must be; remember that. I will make it as easy a task for you as possible. What do you say to a death from poison, a death produced by smelling a rare bouquet of flowers? A single inhalation, a gasp, a faintness, then death in sleep. Will that shock you too much?"

"I don't wish her death upon my hands. Oh, no, no, a thousand times no."

"You're going over old ground. The thing is decided on, and that is enough. You may torture her as much as you like first, but you must kill her afterwards."

"Oh, I can't torture *and* kill her; I'm not sufficient demon for that."

"Well, I never said you were. Is it to be the bouquet of flowers?"

"Yes, yes, it may as well be that if it has to be *anything*. Go on! go on!"

"A bouquet then shall be sent you; or stay, could you not wheedle one out of the English *attaché*, Sir Harry Gordon, don't you think?"

"I will not have him compromised, tempt me as you will. Besides, if he were to send me a bouquet, it would assuredly not be a poisoned one."

"It will not be a poisoned one *in any case*. You will add the poison to the flowers. I thought you would regard it as a refinement of vengeance poisoning your more favoured rival with a bouquet fresh from the hand of her own lover. It seems I was mistaken. You know the orange tupela blossom, which is such a favourite at this time of the year that you never see a nosegay unless it contains three or four. Well, its perfume is sweet, and its closely knit petals would contain a quarter of an ounce of snuff without showing it."

"Snuff? What on earth have flowers to do with snuff, your highness?"

"Oh, you of little understanding," replied the Prince, banteringly, "the snuff, in colour exactly resembling the flower that I have named, will *be* the poison. It will lie all unnoticed amongst the petals, but so light and pungent is it that the inhalation of a sleeping babe would draw it up into its nostrils, and an almost painless death would ensue some five minutes later."

"And this awful snuff—where and how is it to be obtained?"

"I will send it to you in a box of rare enamel, set round with precious stones. Use as much as you require, and retain the box as a souvenir of my esteem. Shall I also forward you the bouquet?"

"Assuredly. There shall not be a chance of danger to the innocent, I am resolved."

"Dear me, how punctilious you are when the party to be imperilled is young, handsome, and, above all, a *man*. Well, be it as you wish, Princess."

"And after the bouquet has had its effect—what then?"

"I will send a doctor for mere form's sake, to certify that she has died from natural causes; and then one of the servants can quietly take her measurement, and go and purchase a coffin at the nearest grocer's, and she can be buried without fuss or ostentation as one of your serfs."

"Yes," said the Princess, "that will be the best way. Oh, how I do wish that it was all over. I've a very great mind to smell the poisoned flowers also."

"In that case, your highness, I really do not see what is to prevent you."

"What! would you actually consign *me* to so ruthless a fate?"

"Only if you desire it. It pains me to oppose anyone's wishes."

"And if I *did* elect to destroy myself, how would all your grand schemes get on without me?"

"My dear Princess, I have my eye even now on a girl as beautiful and almost as high-born as yourself, who would perform your duties equally well."

"And would you forthwith instal her in my place?"

"Within four-and-twenty hours, and all the more readily because she has a *penchant* for the work."

"Then, I'll live to spite her and keep her out of the berth. Promise me, your highness, that you'll never shelve me for a stranger so long as I live and perform my duties faithfully," and she looked appealingly up into his face.

"Oh, I'll promise you that, most faithfully. Obey me and you have naught to fear."

"And this woman whom you speak of? She is not *really* so beautiful as I am—is she?"

"Well, not quite, perhaps. No, certainly not quite. I can see, now that I look into your face, that you are the better favoured of the two. In token thereof, accept this trifle, which, enraged at the trick or two that you have played me lately, I had thought of conferring upon her. You have achieved a victory, not through any superior charms you may possess, but because you have at last gracefully yielded to my will, instead of foolishly defying it."

And as the Police Minister finished speaking, he drew from his pocket a red morocco case, and, touching a spring, the lid flew open, disclosing, on a bed of crimson velvet, a necklet of diamonds and emeralds, worth at least fourteen hundred pounds British money.

This he handed to the Princess, with a bow.

"How magnificent! how superb!" she ejaculated. "'Tis an offering worthy of a king."

"The head of the Secret Police of Russia can afford to reward his faithful servants better than can most monarchs," was the retort. "This is but an earnest of what I shall sometimes present you with over and above your salary, if you continue obedient, silent, and discreet."

"Who would not delight in serving so liberal and generous a master?"

"Well, then, that being settled, let us hie back to business. You are clever at theatricals, Princess—nay, I am not sneering now—in making up the face, I mean. I've seen you alter your countenance almost past recognition. It would be as well, after she was dead, and before the doctor was called in, that you should exercise your art in making the face of the corpse look as unlike its former self as possible. Do you clearly understand me?"

"Yes, yes, I clearly understand you, and promise that it shall be done."

"Right, but your mind is perturbed about something. What are you thinking of?"

"I was wondering to myself whether you could ever have really loved this girl."

"Ay, just as I love a bottle of old port, which I sometimes drink to excess, but always knock off at the first twinge of the gout."

"Then, it would not pain you to look upon your doomed victim?"

"Not in the least, if there is ought to be learnt or otherwise gained by the sight."

"Then come along with me, and you shall see her, without being seen."

He rose at once and followed the Princess out of the room, and along several passages, until she suddenly drew back in part a curtain, and thereby revealed a little window (scarcely more than a peep hole, for it was composed of one pane of glass), through which, on drawing near, he was able to look into a bedroom richly and luxuriantly furnished.

"Do you see anyone whom you know?" asked the Princess, in a whisper.

"I see a dark, sallow-looking woman, who is engaged in mending a dress or some such occupation. There is no one else in the room."

"That dark, sallow-looking woman is the beautiful Ada Bayard."

"And you got her up in that wonderfully skilful manner to deceive me?"

"I shall not deny it, for you would not believe me if I did."

"Of course I should not, and I admire candour. Let us return to the drawing room."

When they had reseated themselves in that apartment the Princess said—

"There is only one awkward thing, or rather circumstance, that might militate against the success of our plans. Amongst my serfs is one named Baba, who has discovered that Ada Bayard is the daughter of a mistress whom she once served, and, strange to say, loved. She has now transferred her affection from the mother to the child. I warn you that she is dangerous."

"Then you must rid yourself of the danger. When can you effect the object that we have on hand? The sooner the better, remember."

"Oh! if it *must* be done, let it be done speedily, I pray of you."

"You shall receive the bouquet tomorrow morning. It and the snuff-box shall arrive within an hour of each other. Let the deed be done tomorrow night, and directly the girl is no more, mind that her decease is reported, according to the law, at the Police Bureau, and the doctor shall then at once attend and draw up his certificate. As for this serf, Baba, send her to Madame Gueillemet, the French milliner in the Nevskoi Prospect, on some message or other, to get her out of the way, and be sure that she shall not return until the funeral is over, or, if you prefer it, *never*!" and the Police Minister looked hard at the Princess as he concluded.

"Oh! let it be never. I know not why, but I both detest and fear that woman."

"Never be it then. As we have nothing more to discuss I will now bid you adieu."

"Farewell!" And the Princess held out her little ring decked hand.

The Police Minister raised her finger tips to his lips, bowed, and quitted the room.

When he had regained his sleigh and re-wrapped himself in his furs he chuckled sardonically as he soliloquized:—

"After all, the best way to rule women is by presents and flattery. I think I see my way clear now. She shall destroy this girl, and the doctor, instead of reporting death from natural causes, shall discover that she has been murdered. The Princess will be arrested on the charge, and perhaps I will so manage it that this Baba shall be an important witness against her. Ha, ha, ha! the poisoned snuff will be found in her possession, the deadly bouquet may not be thrown away, and the green stain will in time show itself on the nostrils and upper lip of the deceased. The death of the daughter will thus present the same symptoms as that of the father. I must invent a plausible reason for the double crime, and find that I received my report of Ada Bayard having left St. Petersburg for Berlin from the Princess, in the character of an accredited police agent, and I shall so slip out of all dangerous consequences resulting from my short and foolish passion, and reap my vengeance at the same time."

CHAPTER XXV.

"SMELL THESE BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS, THEY WILL REVIVE YOU. *HE* SENT THEM TO ME."

MARIE CATHERINE, Princess Olga, felt very miserable after the Police Minister had left her. She was one of those people who shrank not from any crime so long as the time of its accomplishment was a long way off; but the deed that she had now to commit was so near by that it fairly appalled her.

Besides, it is one thing to inflict pain and anguish on those we hate, but a widely different one to dismiss them from the world.

The Princess Olga, like the majority of the Russian ladies of a quarter of a century ago, was grossly superstitious, and the idea that Ada Bayard poisoned, she might ever after be haunted by her ghost of a night, formed one of the unpleasant fears which harassed and troubled her.

Still, the terrible deed must be done; she knew that. She dared not break her pledged word to the grim, stern Police Minister, or far worse than a painless death in sleep might happen *unto her*.

"After all," she murmured, "I shall but send her the sooner to heaven, for she looks like a girl who has never committed a mortal sin—ay, sometimes she appears as though she were half an angel already; whereas, if *I* were sentenced to a sudden death, oh!"—and she finished her self-communing with a shudder.

That day passed slowly away, the night as well (a sleepless one for the Princess); then the next morning came, and with it the bouquet and snuff box.

The Princess opened the latter, and regarded with awful interest the curry-coloured powder with which it was half filled.

It certainly had the smell of snuff at a distance, but, as may readily be imagined, the Princess did not put her pretty little nose very near to it.

At last the night time arrived, the night time that in the brilliant capital of holy (?) Russia, veils so many crimes and sins.

The Princess was very pale and agitated as Ada dressed her for a ball that she was supposed to be going to attend, and Baba had been dispatched to the great French milliner's in the Nevskoi Prospect for some delicate confection of lace which she declared she had set her heart upon wearing on the present occasion.

Through the double casemented window (a necessary precaution to keep out the chilly presence of King Frost), the melodious bells are just ringing for second vespers from within the domed tower of the great church of "Our Lady of Kazan," a fane raised during the height of the Greek schism, and which was intended to rival in grandeur St. Peter's at Rome, yet suffers in every way, and almost grotesquely, by the comparison.

"How beautiful they sound! they seem like voices speaking to one out of heaven," exclaimed Ada, presently, with a burst of feeling which she could not repress.

"Do you *often* think of heaven?" asked the Princess, with a shudder.

"Of course I do, your highness. What else bright and cheerful have I to think of?"

"Many things, I should think. You are young and lovely, and doubtless beloved."

"Alas! all who love me *are in heaven.* Perhaps that is *why* I think of it so much."

"I imagine there is one you love who has not gone there yet, although the other night he was almost dispatched on the journey?" observed the Princess.

Ada made no answer, though the tears rose unbidden to her eyes.

As she was standing behind the Princess' chair, dressing her immense and glossy volumes of jet black hair, she hoped that her emotion would not be noticed; but her false friend saw it all in the full-length mirror which stood directly in front of her, and she remarked, somewhat petulantly—

"Well, if I've won your lover away from you, I'm sure I can't help it. He *will* dance attendance upon me whenever he has a chance. I don't encourage him a bit. In fact, he often keeps far more attractive men from my side."

"Will your highness wear your azure satin dress that's trimmed with swansdown, or the peagreen velvet with the gold and opal adornments?"

"Neither; to-night I shall put on the new crimson plush robe that has no sleeves. I hate sleeves. No matter how narrow they cut them, they always hide the prettiest part of the arm. Don't you think so?"

"Very often, I must own that they do. But how got your highness that dreadful bruise upon your chest?"

"It was a blow," answered the Princess, with a shiver; "I—I was struck there."

"How could anyone have been so brutal?"

"We Russians have far from lost all our barbarism. Saw you ever a Russian wedding?"

"Never. But your highness forgets how short a time I have been in Russia."

"Well, then, one of the essential forms is that, at the second most important portion of the service, the bride kneels down, and presents the bridegroom with a whip, in token of his future authority over her. Not so very long ago he used to perform his share of the pantomime by striking her smartly across the shoulders with it: but that part of the ceremony is now discontinued, and the whip is merely taken home and hung up for *domestic use.* You need not smile, for I tell you a positive fact."

"Then it is a very abominable one," said Ada, congratulating herself, meanwhile, that she had succeeded in changing the topic of conversation, for she felt sure that had the Princess continued to converse on Sir Harry's devotion to her; his apparently unsolicited devotion—moreover, she must have utterly broken down.

Her tormentor, however, was bent upon recurring to the subject, for it seemed to her now her victim was so ready to die that she would be conferring a positive favour upon her by allowing her to smell the death-fraught bouquet.

The toilet went on until the English girl had made her heartless rival look exquisitely beautiful.

Presently she was complete, save the lace that Baba had been osten-

sibly sent to the French milliner's to obtain.

Hark! are they *her* footsteps ascending the marble-stepped, gilt-railed staircase? They are as light as any woman's, but that is because the boots of the wearer are shod with gutta-percha.

He is a tall, gaunt man, wrapped in a military cloak, and with a black, glazed, gold-banded cap drawn well over his eyes.

He has passed the dvornick, or hall porter, by merely showing something that he holds in his hand, and the same token has served as a passport with such other servants as he has met upon the way.

He is the Minister of Police.

The head of the stairs gained, he traversed the well lighted corridors as though he knew every inch of the way, as doubtless he did.

Presently he reached the dark recess, or closet, lighted by the little pane of glass let into the wall, which commands a view of the Princess' bedroom.

He draws aside the velvet curtain a matter of half an inch, and prepares to wait and watch.

"Ah!" he presently mutters to himself, "she is resolved that her victim's dying gaze shall drink in the incomparable beauty of her murderess. Had she not her father's accursed eyes, methinks that I could see her mother again in her, and be content to worship at an old shrine repainted and regilded. As it is, however, she must serve my purpose, and then perish. Now to watch how she performs her work."

"Do you not think that I shall bewitch him still more to-night?" asked the Princess, as she rose from the chair in which she had so long been seated, and sailed to and fro, with much rustling of her long silken train, in front of the full length mirror, glancing over a smooth, polished shoulder each time at her fair presentment. "I feel that I will change your Englishman's love to positive worship on the present occasion, do not you? Come, child, I will wager you a pair of gloves against a kiss that he urges me to hasten our wedding by at least a month."

"Has he, then, actually asked you to *marry* him?" gasped Ada, hysterically.

"Did I not tell you that he called upon me for that express purpose, yesterday? Ah, I daresay it slipped my memory. Poor fellow, he *did* look such a fool. He had evidently made a set speech, and then quite forgotten it. I just tortured him a little, and then dismissed him with neither a 'yes' nor a 'no.'"

"And will you treat him in the same way if he repeats his offer to-night?"

"No, I think that I may have pity on him, for he is really a very nice-looking fellow. Married, we should make the handsomest couple in St. Petersburg."

"And in a month the most wretched," gasped Ada, with a bitter smile.

"Well, I daresay I should drive him half wild with jealousy, for I could never content myself with the worship of one man. Like the fair, white moon in heaven I like to shine on all alike, and in return to see every face that I help to lighten turned towards me in thankful admiration. Now, if a husband tried to change me into a mere lamp, that he could shut up in his own house, and force to shine on him alone, he would find me very obstinate and rebellious."

Astonished that the girl whom she was mentally torturing made her no answer, the Princess turned sharply towards her, and for the first time perceived that she had sunk,

half fainting, into the chair from which she herself had just risen.

"The moment has arrived," thought the Princess, and glided over to the toilet table, where she herself had laid the poisoned bouquet gently down ere she had rung for Ada to dress her. Taking it up in her hand she re-crossed the chamber, and bending over her victim, held it close to her nostrils, saying—

"Smell these beautiful flowers; they will revive you. *He sent them to me.*"

The last most cruel taunt—for be it remembered that it was levelled at one whom she believed would carry it as a last painful remembrance to her grave—indubitably saved Ada Bayard's life; for, seized with a momentary resentful passion, instead of smelling the bouquet, she grasped the mass of beautiful flowers in her hand, tore them away from the Princess, and scattered them all over the floor.

Then, with a low moan and a perceptible shudder, she fainted dead away.

"The fool! the blundering idiot! That milk white back of hers shall be cut into red, fluttering ribands for this," muttered the Police Minister, fiercely, to himself; and then, with flashing eyes and clenched fists, he was about to break into the apartment where the Princess now stood gazing by turns at the unconscious girl and the scattered flowers with the air and aspect of one who, owing to the catastrophe, had sealed her own doom, when suddenly he became rooted to the spot, owing to observing the Princess' door open and no fewer than thirteen men glide noiselessly, one after the other, into the room.

As for the Princess, believing that the vengeance of the Police Minister was about to fall upon her, as a consequence of the failure that she had just been guilty of, she uttered a shrill shriek, and falling upon her knees, piteously implored pity and pardon, for all the men wore masks, and she knew not but that one of them might be Prince Golgorouki himself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOUR CHAIR THE CZAR'S GOLDEN THRONE; YOUR REALM THE HALF OF EUROPE."

"Be tranquil and fear nothing," suddenly exclaimed a voice. "We are friends. We have come to aid and serve you. Is she not beautiful, comrades?"

The last sentence was apparently addressed to the twelve other masked and shrouded forms, for immediately every head was bowed as though in assent.

The Princess felt somewhat reassured. Her heart no longer seemed to require holding in its place with her little bejewelled hands. She even called up a smile, and tremulously demanded from the intruders what they required of her.

"We will come to that presently, your highness," answered he who appeared to be their spokesman. "Before we tell you what we desire *you to do for us*, it might be better that we informed you what we have already done and are ready and willing to do for you. Gratitude may then second our prayers."

"Oh, you have dared to intrude into my palace to ask favours?"

"No. We have intruded to prevent you from committing an abominable crime."

The Police Minister here muttered something to himself within the closet.

As for the Princess, all her terror returned at this half accusation; so convulsed indeed did she become with fear that her teeth chattered, and she had to grasp with both hands the back of a chair for support.

"Oh," she wailed forth, "the crime is not committed. I am innocent."

"It is well. Know you *why* you were asked to perpetrate this crime? It was in order that the Police Minister might saddle it, and also a smaller one, of which *he* was indirectly guilty, on to your shoulders, and so gain the opportunity of crushing you. I tell you naught but the truth."

"And who are you who dares thus to accuse the mighty Police Minister?"

"One whom he deems a blind and unscrupulous agent, which indeed I am, as long as it suits my turn, but no longer," was the reply. And as the speaker concluded he removed for a moment his mask, and revealed a face as white as the enamel dial of a watch, with eyebrows and moustaches as blue-black as the hands that move thereon. It was a countenance once seen never to be forgotten.

"That infernal scoundrel, Ivan Reyloff!" muttered Prince Golgorouki to himself within the closet. "I am about to hear something that will be highly interesting and useful, I imagine. How fortunate that in the present instance I attended to my own business instead of intrusting it to a deputy."

"I can't say that your face par-

ticularly charms me—so now for your good deeds," said the Princess; who, directly she found that her interlocutor was opposed to the Police Minister instead of acting on his behalf, lost nearly all her fears.

The fact was she could not imagine any other source of mingled terror and power in Russia. Of the new sect called Nihilists she had heard little or nothing. Her duties as a police agent had lain solely within the walls of palaces.

"You may despise me and my assertions at present, Princess," said Ivan Reyloff, bitterly; "but when you have heard me to the end you will cease to do so."

He here pulled a watch from his pocket, and then continued—

"You were to have murdered that girl with a poisoned bouquet. You needn't answer me, for it will be a waste of valuable time, and I am quite equal to do all the talking myself. You were to have murdered her, I say, and then to have sent to report her death, as by law required, at the Police Bureau. A doctor was promised to be sent here who should state that the girl had died from natural causes; but he would have been instructed to report her murdered. The bouquet, the snuff-box—that very snuff-box that you were requested to retain as a souvenir—were to be used as evidence against you; and you were finally to be tried in private, found guilty, and doomed to perish 'neath the knout."

"The villain! How could he ever have learnt all that? There must be many earholes in the walls of this house," muttered the listening Police Minister to himself.

"Oh," wailed forth the beautiful Princess, wringing her hands, "how could he have been so cruel? What have I done to make him hate me so?"

"You have dared to resemble the mother who jilted him and the father who cut him out in her affections. Those are the reasons that he hates you."

"Oh, but that is preposterous. I cannot believe so absurd a tale."

"You will be prudent to do so. He has directly or indirectly caused the deaths of your parents and of all your brothers and sisters. You are the last of your name and race, and he has left you to the end for a *bonne bouche*. Through his connivance you were ruined at the gaming-table, and in your desperation he forced you to enter the Secret Police. This night he intended to sacrifice you for doing him a service, for it is a vital necessity to him that yonder girl should die, and it is his pleasure that you should suffer death for destroying her. Oh, the Prince has more than one bait to each of his hooks, believe me."

"Ah, you speak with an air of terrible conviction. I believe you now, even against my will and reason. Oh, fool that I was to listen to his cajoleries whilst I yet bore the mark of his brutal blow upon my flesh!"

"The tiger is more to be feared when he purrs than when he roars, your highness."

"Too true, too true. But what is to be done? The girl is not dead. Instead of smelling the flowers she dashed them from my hand. *Can* you save me? and if so, have you the will and courage to attempt it? I am not rich, but if I lack gold I have emeralds and diamonds of rare value, and they shall be yours—all—all—"

"We want neither your emeralds nor your diamonds," then said Ivan Reyloff. "We are conspirators against the Czar and his infamous Ministers. We are about to found a republic on the ruins of an empire. In France they once chose the most

beautiful woman whom they could find as fitting emblem of the new order of things, and men fell down and worshipped her as the Goddess of Reason, though, in truth, she was a pitiful drab, fished out of the mud of the streets. *We* are more ambitious. We want something noble to emblazon on our banners and upon our coinage, to enthrone in our temple and within our hearts, and we have found it *in thee.*"

"In thee," repeated the twelve other masked men, like an echo.

"Are you a collection of madmen?" demanded the Princess, breathlessly.

"If we are," replied Ivan Reyloff, "we are at the head of ninety thousand Russians, who, in accepting us as their leaders and guides, must be madder than we. The first blow struck, and by Our Lady of Kazan, the sword is already uplifted, those numbers will change in less than a week to nine hundred thousand or more. The strength of a downtrodden people is enormous when they once rise *en masse* against their oppressors. Speak but the word, and I swear unto you that within a week from now your home shall be the Winter Palace, your chair the Czar's golden throne, your realm the half of Europe."

"You hold forth a bright and ambitious future to the grasp of a mere girl; but you must expect something in return for all this — what is it?"

"Passive acquiescence in all that we do, both before and after we have raised you to the pinnacle of greatness that I have spoken of. We can make you the idol of this great nation, but we must be the priests who pull the wires that cause the idol to wink, to smile, or to prophesy; we will pour wealth and jewels into your lap—we will allow you to shine with the effulgence of the summer sun at noonday—but whilst you charm and inflame all hearts, we must govern them in your name. Have I spoken with sufficient plainness?"

"Assuredly; but what would you have me do in the first instance?"

"To become the butterfly you must first enter into the chrysalis state. We have no palace or throne to offer you yet, although you are within a week's journey of them, the grave is a dark and dreary antechamber to heaven, yet heaven cannot be entered save through its dismal portals."

"Tell me, in a word, whither you propose now to take me?"

"I will be candid. To a cellar beneath one of the meanest houses in St. Petersburg; but then its door is sealed against the Police Minister."

"Oh! I should die in such a place," moaned the beautiful Princess.

"You will assuredly die unless you accept it as a shelter, your highness."

"Cannot you spare a portion of your ninety thousand men to protect your future Empress and divinity within the walls of her own palace?"

"Impossible; for we dare not show our strength until we are prepared to strike. That would be to court destruction instead of to inflict it."

"Oh, then, give me time to think. Do not force me to take a step that I may afterwards regret. To fall is bad enough, but to fall as the goddess of the *canaille* would add a sting to death worse than that of the knout."

"Your highness, we are not all *canaille*, as you are pleased to term us. In our ranks are some of the noblest names and most exalted minds in Russia. Men there are who have won honours at the universities; men who have enlarged

their ideas of freedom by foreign travel; poets, philosophers; ay, even a thin sprinkling of the younger nobility."

"Ah, your last five words give me some comfort; and yet I again pray for time to reflect. I seem to stand on a narrow ledge of rock with a precipice on either side. I think that you have convinced me that yours is the shallower of the two, even if there is more mud at the bottom, but I feel certain of nothing except that I have not the courage to die. How long will you give me to consider your proposals?"

"Were I to allow you more than an hour it would be equivalent to signing your death warrant. That, or nearly that time will, I think, be almost safe for you to take. Is it your desire that we withdraw for that period?"

"Yes, go! I can indulge in calmer reflection if left alone."

"But you must give me your most solemn assurance that you will not betray us?"

"Willingly. Why *should* I betray you when you have tried to do me a service?"

"You speak wisely, for we are your only hope *on earth*."

And without waiting for a reply, the thirteen masked men bowed almost to the ground, and then quitted the room in Indian file.

"I must follow them. I must discover where their secret headquarters are. He who serves himself is always well served. She can wait my return. Woe unto her for this night's work!" muttered the Police Minister to himself, as he quitted his hiding place in the rear of the Nihilist conspirators, and cautiously followed them down into the street.

No servants were to be seen, even the dvornic, or hall porter, was not in his usual cosy leathern box chair. The door stood wide open.

"Ah, others, I see, can bribe as well as I," soliloquised the Police Minister, bitterly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I AM SPEAKING OF ONE WHO *DID* DREAM THAT YOU LOVED HER!"

We must leave the Olga Palace and the tragic events that are destined still to occur therein, to follow the steps of Baba.

She was not so pliant a tool in the hands of her employers as those employers had imagined, in proof whereof she had resolved to pay another call whilst she was out, in addition to her deputed one at the French milliner's.

That morning, in another brief interview which, at great risk to herself, she had obtained with Ada Bayard, she had enticed from her the secret that she loved the English *attaché*, who the day before had called upon the Princess, and had once believed that he loved her in return.

"If he *did* once love her he could never cease to love her, because that would be impossible," thought the faithful Baba to herself. "If, therefore, I discover him, and tell him that she is in peril, he may find a way of serving her, for they say that the British Ambassador is a powerful man."

So she made her way, in the first instance, towards the British Embassy, instead of to the French milliner's shop on the Nevskoi Prospect, outside which the police were waiting to arrest her on a fictitious charge of robbery.

When she reached the palace of the British Embassy, its grandeur almost appalled her, and she was not at all encouraged by observing that the dvornics at the outer door were Russians.

After a few moments' hesitation, she, however, went boldy up the broad granite steps into the columned portico, where, in as firm a voice as she could assume, she asked to see Sir Harry Gordon.

The two hall porters, who, though temporarily servants of the English government, were at the same time paid spies of their own, pretended at first not to know whom she meant; but when she persisted that there *was* such an officer attached to the Embassy, and again and again pronounced his name, they changed their manner, and demanded, sneeringly, "What could an English gentleman want with the likes of her?" and ordered her to "get away at once, if she would avoid unpleasant consequences."

As she still stood her ground, and repeated her entreaties, the two ruffians took hold of her by either arm, ran her down the steps, and would have dashed her face foremost into the snow, had not one of them received a slash across the face, and the other a rap over the head from a tolerably thick Malacca cane, which caused them to release their victim, and bow their heads in slavish obsequiousness almost to the ground, to him who had paid them such delicate attentions.

Baba, freed from their tenacious and painful grip, looked up to discover that her rescuer was no other

than him whom she desired so much to get speech with—the young English *attaché*.

"Have the brutes hurt you, my good woman?" inquired he, kindly.

"No, sir," she answered, in her broken English, "not very much."

"What had you done to make them use you in such a manner?"

"She would insist on seeing a person who wasn't in existence, Excellency."

This from one of the men, and his companion added, "And she's a known bad character."

"It's all false," said poor Baba, "it's you yourself whom I desire to see, sir. I—I am of the household of the Princess Olga."

"In itself a sufficient refutation of those rascals' calumnies. Well?"

"I much wish to speak to you on a matter of importance—out of their hearing."

"Off with you, back to your dens, you scoundrels!" exclaimed Sir Harry, flourishing his cane, for he was rapidly acquiring Russian manners towards his inferiors, as all men in time do who live in St. Petersburg.

The two hall porters at once slunk away, muttering curses, not loud but deep, against Baba, who, they resolved, should ere long deeply rue having got them into a scrape.

Never were men more likely to keep their word; the more so as, like nearly all of their profession, they were in the pay of the police, as well as in that of their ostensible employers.

"Now, my good woman, you may speak freely, and without fear."

"Well, sir, would you serve a young countrywoman of your own?"

"Of course I would, but I thought you were a serf of the Princess Olga?"

"So I am, but I would speak now of one who is her guest. Her guest, did I say? Her *slave* would be the better term. The Princess means her some mischief; I'm sure that she does, and all because she is so much more beautiful than herself, which is the one fault that she cannot forgive."

"For heaven's sake, my good soul, tell me of whom you are speaking;"

"Ah, sir, I am speaking of one who did dream that you loved her. If ever a poor wretched, friendless orphan girl needed the love of a man possessing a stout heart and a strong arm to protect her, *she* does at this moment."

"But this is not telling me who she is."

"Does not your own heart tell you, sir, that I am speaking of Miss A—?"

"Gordon, how are you, my dear fellah? Ha! I've caught you, have I?" exclaimed at this moment a merry, boisterous voice, and the young *attaché* was seized hold of by both shoulders and wheeled round until he faced a Russian youth of about his own age, with whom he had been rather friendly of late.

"Alexis, excuse me for one moment," said he.

"No, no, old fellah," laughed his Muscovite acquaintance, who either was or else pretended to be three sheets in the wind. "Ha, ha, ha! don't allow any of these goings on, you know. Nice little party, I've no doubt, but it'll never do, you know."

And all this while, for he was as strong as a bull, the loudly-laughing and merry-looking Russian kept Sir Harry facing him.

Meanwhile what was Baba doing, or rather, being *done to*?

The very instant that the young swell Alexis (a swell in the pay of the police, for he had squandered away his patrimony long ago), had

apparently larkingly wheeled Sir Harry round, two men, one of whom carried a great loose muffler in his hand, sprang upon Baba from behind.

The muffler was thrown over her head, and a portion thereof crammed into her mouth, so that it was impossible for her to utter a single articulate sound, and no sooner was this done than the two men half carried, half dragged her round the corner of the street (much to the amusement and delight of the grinning hall porters), thrust her into a sleigh that was waiting there, and drove her off with lightning speed in the direction of the nearest police station.

All this while, Alexis, who was a Putparoochick, or sub-lieutenant in the Cossacks of the Guard, playfully tussled with the young Englishman, only suffering himself, after a lapse of two or three minutes, to be convinced by him that he had interrupted not a disreputable assignation, but a conversation of considerable importance.

"Awfully sorry, I'm shaw, my dear fellah; but who'd have thought it, you know?" he then exclaimed; for young Russia not only speaks our language as well as we do, but drawls, lisps, and slangs it with equal skill.

He let Sir Harry go then, who, on looking round, perceived that Baba had disappeared.

"Confound it! She's gone!" he ejaculated.

"By Jawve, so she has," echoed Putparoochick Alexis, as he fixed a gold-rimmed glass in his dexter eye. "How very wemarkable, to be shaw. Got clear away, I declare."

"Did you observe which way she went, Alexis?" asked our hero.

"No, I really did not observe her vanish. It's very wemarkable, though."

"I'd have given a hundred guineas to have heard what she had to say."

"You stop here then, my friend, and I'll try to hunt the creetshaw up. I noticed her headdress, and so shall know her again. Now, don't you stir, in case she should come back to this spot, after I am gone, d'ye see?"

And ere Sir Harry could remonstrate he was off.

The *attaché* walked slowly up and down in front of the palace of the Embassy for nearly a quarter of an hour, but no Baba showed up again, nor did his volatile friend Alexis return either.

By that time he had worked himself up into a perfect fever of anxious thought.

He had never been quite easy in his mind about Ada since the discovery that her father had been poisoned.

Her departure had been so sudden, and one event had followed so rapidly upon another, that no wonder vague suspicions and a general feeling of uneasiness had taken up their abode in his breast, a feeling which his interview with Baba had changed into horrible surmises.

"I wish that fool Alexis had tumbled down and broken his neck rather than turned up at such a moment," he muttered to himself. "As it is, I have heard too little, and yet too much. Too little to excuse me for taking immediate and decisive action; too much to bear passively without going mad. But I'll be shot if I *will* bear it passively. At the cost of courtesy, good breeding, and all the proprieties, I'll satisfy myself at once and for ever."

Leaning heavily on his stick, for he was still somewhat feeble, our hero then bent his steps in the direction of the Olga Palace; much wondering, it must be owned, what he should do and say when he got there.

He could not hide from himself that he had only the very vaguest surmises to act on, and that even did he get inside the Princess' abode he had not the tittle of an excuse for daring to search it.

Even for the rudeness that he contemplated he ran the risk of being kicked out of polite society during the remainder of his stay in Russia, if not of being positively ordered home by his chief.

But the chance that Ada was still at St. Petersburg and in serious peril, overcame both scruples and fears, so he resolved that he would *force* his way into the palace of the Princess, if he could gain admittance in no other manner, and once there, if all other means failed, shout Ada's name aloud, in the hope of eliciting an answer.

Full of these resolves, he had got as far as the corner of the Navedskoi Strasse, when a sleigh was suddenly reined up close in front of him, and a gruff yet not uncourteous voice hailed him with—

"This is not a fit time for an invalid to be out of doors, surely."

Sir Harry looked up and saw that the speaker was Prince Golgorouki.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SUDDENLY HE HEARD THE SOUND OF DISTANT FIRING.

"I'm on my way to the palace of the Princess Olga," said our hero.

"What! at such an hour, and this not one of her highness' reception nights?"

"I wish to see her on a matter of the most urgent importance."

"But have you reflected on the possible consequences of such a step? The Princess is young, beautiful, and an orphan—with her known amiability she might consent to see you; but are you the man to set all the censorious tongues in St. Petersburg wagging at her indiscretion? The reputation of a young and high-born girl ought to be dearer to you than that, surely?"

"Your highness is right, and I will postpone my call. By-the-by, are you quite sure your informant was not mistaken when he reported that Miss Bayard had set out for England, *viâ* Berlin, the other morning?"

"It was her father who informed me; I met him on his way to the Winter Palace, and he had just seen her off by the train, he said."

"Do you think he could have had any object in deceiving you?"

"Well, people do attempt to deceive me now and then."

"Attempt? I suppose you mean by that word that they never succeed?"

"Not for long, provided that they deceive on matters of any consequence."

"Then, can you tell me for certain that Miss Bayard has left St. Petersburg?"

"Well, naturally, I have but her dead father's word for it. If you desire, I will let you know the truth at noon to-morrow, though."

"You would be conferring on me an immense obligation, if you would, your highness. A rumour has reached me that she is a guest of the Princess Olga, who exercises a cruel and despotic power over her."

"Absurd! Who on earth could have been your informant, Sir Harry?"

"It was an anonymous communication—she did not tell me her name."

"Really, you should know us Russians better by this time than to give any credit to such an altogether ridiculous report."

"Well, I begin to believe that I was a fool, upon my word, I do."

"Don't they say that it is the reverse of polite to contradict anyone?" laughed the Prince. "However, joking apart, call at my palace about noon to-morrow, and I'll set your mind perfectly at rest. And now, if you will take my advice, you'll get home as quickly as possible, and go to bed. St. Petersburg night air is far from wholesome."

"I think I'll take a *little* farther stroll first," rejoined the *attaché*.

The fact was, Sir Harry felt that even the outside of the Princess' palace would give him some ease of mind to look at, albeit that he had made up his mind not to seek admission.

But the fact of his wandering farther did not seem at all welcome

news to the Police Minister, who treated our hero to a furtive scowl when he wasn't looking, and then said, very pleasantly—

"Come, if you won't go home, you sombre night-bird, you'd far better jump into my sleigh, and bear me company for a while. An insurrection of those troublesome folks we call Nihilists, who are a kind of cousin-german to your Fenians, has broken out in the city, and I am quelling it. You need not look around, for you won't see any of the gentry about, though half an hour from now there'll be dragoons and Cossacks enough, for which reason it will be far safer for you to return to the Embassy in my company than alone. In that black hat and cloak you look wondrously like a conspirator."

At this sally Sir Harry laughed, as doubtless he was expected to do. He, moreover, accepted the Police Minister's invitation, for he was quite awake to the fact of how useful a matter it might be (were Ada Bayard really detained by unfair means in Russia) to be on terms of friendship with that all-powerful individual.

Besides, he had given his word to do nothing until the morrow, wherefore how his time was spent between whiles seemed a matter of perfect unimportance.

So he stepped into the sleigh, the ischvostchick whipped up the horses, and away they sped o'er the hard frozen surface of the snow.

What happened during the succeeding hour ever afterwards appeared to our hero like a dream.

He was so full of his own painful thoughts, doubts, and fears that he conversed with very little real knowledge of *what* he was talking about, and, in fact, allowed the Police Minister to pump him as he listed.

All the while the sleigh—not the Prince's usual one, for at times like these he flitted about the metropolis in such a manner as not to be known—dashed through street after street, all monotonously regular, and presenting mile after mile of pillared and piazzaed houses, some stuccoed, some whitewashed, and some painted in divers bright and gaudy colours; whilst each long vista of flaring lamps was generally terminated by a church, crowned by a bulbous-shaped dome of gleaming copper, topped by a gilded cross.

Sometimes a sudden turn would reveal to them the frozen waters of the Neva—a river as broad as the Thames at Greenwich. The Russian stream then only boasted of bridges in the summer time, however, for at the close of autumn they were all removed, lest the drifting ice should dash them to pieces.

At the corner of each street the sleigh was reined up for an instant at the police-house, an erection very like our modern cabmen's shelters, and the main furniture of which consisted of a bench and an enormous stove to prevent the guardians of public safety from freezing to death.

Guardians of the public safety?—what a misapplied term! Why, in 1860, it was proved most conclusively and clearly that more than half the murders committed in the capital were perpetrated by these very men.

At one of these halts a letter was handed to the Prince by a police lieutenant, who intimated that he had been seeking his highness everywhere.

"It was given me at the palace,' said the man, making a stiff, military salute, "with instructions that I was to hand it to your highness immediately. Finding that you had quitted the bureau I hurried on to all the important points that your highness was likely to visit, with the satisfac-

tion of at last finding you," and up went the back of his hand to the peak of his cap again.

Meanwhile the Police Minister glanced with considerable surprise, not unmingled with a vague feeling of uneasiness, at the outside of the dispatch, for the address was in the handwriting of the Czar, and in the great red wax seal a piece of feather twitched from a quill pen was inserted, such being the usual Russian emblem for "deliver with all speed."

The Prince's fingers trembled as he tore the missive open.

It was short, but very much to the point, notwithstanding.

"WINTER PALACE,
"*Wednesday*, 9.45 *p.m.*

"DEAR GOLGOROUKI,—I have resolved that no woman or child shall henceforth be punished in Russia with either knout or plet. I have also determined from this date to investigate *personally* all cases in which a death punishment is decreed against a female offender. Please bear those two points in mind, as well as the date I have affixed hereto.

"ALEXANDER, Imp."

"Curse it—what can be the meaning of this sudden whim of the Czar's?" muttered the Police Minister to himself, as, according to Russian etiquette, he placed the missive to his lips and forehead ere folding it up and putting it in his pocket.

Then, as the ischvostchick whipped up his cattle, and they tore along towards the next police post, he went on soliloquizing somewhat after the following fashion:—

"Does the Czar suspect something, or is it only an idle notion that has got into his head? I will walk warily, for all things seem to be conspiring against me. I must get those two women out of St. Petersburg, anyhow, and that before the morning dawns. Curses! that I should be unable to knout that Olga fiend; but I dare not do it, for I know not but that I am surrounded by spies, I would have staked my life on Ivan Reyloff's fidelity, and since *he* has deceived me, who else can I trust? She shall not benefit by the Czar's having tied my hands, however, for he has not yet closed the road to Siberia against me, and in that direction shall she and the English girl be travelling before the rising sun gilds the eastern sky. Where shall be their first halting-place? Not the bureau, for it might be unsafe in the present instance. Ha! I have it—a good idea, that will obviate all danger."

Having settled the futures of the Princess and Ada Bayard pleasantly in his own mind, the Prince began to converse again, and so for another quarter of an hour they sped from street to street, the Police Minister only once pulling up at a place which was not a police post, but a huge kind of emporium, whose stock in trade seemed to be hearses and mourning coaches.

A little while after this, and just as Sir Harry Gordon was beginning to feel chilly and sleepy, the sleigh whisked round a corner, and the next moment was drawn sharply up before the British Embassy.

"There you are, my young friend," said the Prince, "and now just take my advice and have a glass of something stiff and strong before you turn in for the night. Should you presently hear any unusual noises in the streets don't let them disturb you, for when rebellion uprears its head in Russia we have a somewhat short and sharp manner of putting it down. The police and the Cossacks will have the public thoroughfares all to themselves in another ten minutes—so good night to you."

"You will not forget your promise to me, your highness?"

"Respecting Miss Bayard? Certainly not. I treat a promise as the most sacred thing on earth. Come to me at noon to-morrow; but don't let the doubt of her safety keep you awake—for I am morally certain that you have got hold of a mare's nest," and, with a gay good night, the Police Minister ordered his ischvostchick to drive on.

Five minutes later our hero was looking forth through the double glass of his bedroom window upon the full winter moon, as it flooded the copper-plated, onion-shaped dome of the great church of Our Lady of Kazan, and the ridgy succession of bright green roofs of the houses above which it rose with silvery radiance.

Suddenly he heard the sound of distant firing, and thereby knew that the work of suppression and slaughter had commenced.

CHAPTER XXIX

"THE POLICE MINISTER KNOWS YOU ARE HERE."

It is now high time for us to return to the Princess Olga, whom we left in a state of terror and distraction bordering almost on madness.

She did not relish the idea of becoming the Queen of the Mob—the idol of the great unwashed—even though they might number millions and millions of adorers, with half the enthusiasm that Ivan Reyloff had hoped and confidently expected that she would do.

Besides, she had no confidence in his succeeding in his enterprise, and she could guess pretty accurately what *her* fate would be if she cast in her lot with it and it failed.

As a member of the aristocracy who had gone over to the cause of the down-trodden and oppressed people, her doom would be one of frightful severity.

As she thought of it she seemed to remember the history of a beautiful young countess who conspired against the Empress Catherine and was boiled alive in a huge caldron of oil as a punishment for her transgression.

"Oh, what should she do?"

Again and again she put to herself this terribly momentous question, pacing up and down her sumptuously furnished bed chamber the while, as a beauteous and graceful leopard prowls up and down inside the bars of his cage, wondering how he shall get out.

Poor Marie Catherine, Princess Olga, had a far more difficult prison to escape from than any leopard shut up in a menagerie. The bars that encompassed *her* were far stronger than those of a wild beast cage.

How all her diamonds glittered as her bosom rose and fell with the stormy emotions that shook her frame! How the golden chains that attached her armlets to her bracelets jingled and clinked as she tossed those lovely arms about in the agony of her terror! You could have heard the wild throbbing of her heart against her tightly fitting bodice, and the occasional pressure of her little clasped hands wholly failed to lessen its painful beat. Once she took up a dagger with the intention of plunging it hilt deep into her body. A single vigorous thrust, and she knew that all her troubles—on earth at least—would be over. But at the thought of the hereafter she turned coward, and threw the weapon away.

Then she looked up, and beheld Ada Bayard's eyes wide open, and regarding her intently.

But at the same moment a plan of escape out of their difficulties and dangers presented itself to her, and with almost an hysterical cry she exclaimed—"Saved, saved, saved!"

"What is the matter?" asked Ada, faintly. "Oh, I know: the flowers. He gave them to you, and you are going to marry him—is it not so?"

"No, dear. No, no, no! a hundred times no!" exclaimed the Princess, crossing the room and throwing herself on her knees before Ada.

"I have been very wicked to treat you so. I am nothing to Sir Harry Gordon, and he is—well, very little to me. But if you wish ever to see him again you must brace up your nerves now, for we have a trying ordeal to go through. Ada Bayard, you must call up all the courage of your English race."

"If it will preserve your highness from any peril, you may depend upon me," replied Ada, passing the back of her hand across her eyes and looking confusedly around.

"It will save me from the very greatest peril, and yourself as well. The Police Minister knows you are here. With to-morrow's dawn he will come to claim you. Ay, not only you, but me also, as your accomplice. There is but one hope for us, and that is to make our way immediately and in secret to the Winter Palace, and there cast ourselves on the mercy and clemency of the Czar. If our beauty and our tears fail, which I do not for a moment fear, I have yet something else that will make us welcome—the knowledge of a secret conspiracy against his Majesty's rule and life."

"But, your highness, have you thought of the dangers of the streets at night, and of the awful police, who are everywhere at this hour?"

"All, all, Ada. You forget that I, too, am of the police. If I show my little gold badge, and state that I am on secret service, they *must* let me pass—ay, even into the very palace of the Emperor."

"Tell me what I am to do, your highness, and you shall find it *well* done," answered the English girl, rising to her feet.

"It is I who have to do the most. *Your* work is already well-nigh performed. I have to restore to you all the beauty that I robbed you of the other day. We must both of us look as lovely as angels when we enter the presence of the Czar Cover me all up with that loose dressing gown, Ada, and then draw a basin nearly full of hot water from the samovar boiler, and I will set to work upon you. Believe me that we have not a moment to lose."

Ada knew nothing, be it remembered, of the visit of the thirteen masked men, or that they were to return in an hour for the Princess' answer to their most perilous proposals.

"Oh, let me pick up those beautiful flowers—how did they get scattered all about the room?" she exclaimed, suddenly.

"No, no, let them lie," gasped the Princess. But as Ada was drawing the hot water, a luxury always at hand in a well appointed Russian bedroom, she herself picked up such of the flowers as were poisoned and threw them into the fire at the back of the stove, where in an instant they were consumed.

The next twenty minutes were taken up in restoring Ada's hair and complexion to their original colour, and in getting the *émail noir* off her teeth. How exquisitely lovely she looked when all this was accomplished!

The Princess drew forth her diamond-backed watch at this juncture and anxiously consulted it; thirty-five minutes had already elapsed since the departure of the masked conspirators.

In twenty-five more they would return.

There was evidently not a second to be wasted.

"Ada," said the Princess, "my light blue velvet will about fit you and set off your beauty to the utmost advantage as well,—you must wear it, *ma mignon*."

"Your highness, pray don't flatter me so—I really do not like it."

"I only begin to perceive your

beauty, *ma belle*, now that I see a likelihood of its profiting myself," laughed the Princess, for she had by this time almost taken leave of her fears. "Come, bring me the dress."

Ada crossed over to the great wardrobe and brought the robe to the Princess, and in another couple of minutes she had it on.

It fitted her as though she had been expressly measured for it. Oh, how beautiful she looked—a poet's dream, an artist's most heavenly conception, a sight to cause the heart to pulsate with almost more than earthly rapture!

In another minute her toilet was completed.

"Now," exclaimed the Princess, triumphantly, as she took off and threw aside the robe de chambre that she had put on to protect her own rich costume whilst washing Ada Bayard's face and hair. "Now," she repeated, as she twined an arm round her companion's waist and drew her towards the immense mirror let into the wardrobe, that reached unto the very floor, "are we not *both* lovely?"

"I think your highness the loveliest of the lovely," answered Ada, rapturously. And it was no flattery, for the fair English girl really believed what she said.

"And I *know* that *you* are," sighed her companion, sorrowfully. "I could have killed you at one time for daring to be fairer than myself. Indeed, I don't know but that I could do it now, were we both out of danger, which reminds me that we must still hurry on. Quick, then, dear, get two warmly quilted cloaks out of yonder cupboard — cloaks having hoods to draw over our heads. You will find some wadding quilted masks there also. We must not enter the Czar's presence blue nosed, or the spell will be broken."

"Hark!" exclaimed Ada, with a start, "did I not hear the bray of trumpets?"

"Never mind if you did — they can have nothing to do with us."

Ada said no more, but went for the out-door wraps.

"How cold it will be in the streets," observed the Princess, with a shudder; "and I dare not order the sleigh for fear that even my own coachman might drive us to the Police Bureau instead of to the Winter Palace. There is no faith to be put in anyone here. Even our very saints play into the hands of our enemies. Now, St. Sergius, of all the saints in the calendar, should have stuck to me; for I am sure no one has offered more wax candles at his shrine. I vow I'd pick his eyes out with my scissors, for his ingratitude, if I could only spare the time; but I can't, for we must be off at once. Oh, God of Heaven! What can *that* be, Ada?"

CHAPTER XXX.

"IT IS TOO LATE TO ESCAPE."

"It sounds like a number of people bringing heavy boxes upstairs," said Ada Bayard, in answer to the Princess Olga's terrified ejaculation; and then she began to grow frightened in turn, and wailed forth, "Oh, what *can* it be?"

"Come," said the Princess, suddenly. "We mustn't allow our courage to fail us thus. We will slip out of the room, hide in the semi-darkness of one of the lobbies, and glide down the staircase directly the way is clear. I have my police badge in my bosom."

Hurriedly fixing on their masks, and huddling on their cloaks, the two girls made for the door.

It was the Princess who drew it cautiously open and peered anxiously forth.

As she did so she uttered a gasp of horror, and quickly closed the door again.

"The cupboard!" exclaimed she; "the cupboard, Ada. It is too late to escape. They are already at the head of the stairs, and coming straight hither: twelve men, carrying two coffins on their shoulders. Oh, I am ready to sink into the floor with fear."

"No, no, come, come, let us hide ourselves as you propose. It may be all a mistake. You have told me how prevalent the floury typhus is in the city. The men may have brought the coffins to the wrong house."

"Pray heaven that it may be so; yet something seems to whisper to me that *they are for us.* I—I—I was to have poisoned you to-night—that would account for one. But the other—the second? Ha, I have it! The brutal Police Minister intends to bury *me alive.* All that the Nihilists told me about him is true. Oh, Ada, Ada, the cupboard is our only hope!"

The two beautiful but doomed girls dragged their trembling limbs across the floor to where the huge press-closet stood, itself the size of a small room. Into it they darted and therein locked themselves. Then, pulling out the key, they took it by turns to peer through the keyhole into the bedroom.

They had not reached their hiding place any too soon, for the next instant the bedroom door was dashed violently open, and in came twelve helmeted and grey greatcoated policemen, each six bearing a coffin upon their shoulders, which they roughly deposited on the carpet.

"Oh, the common black, painted things, they are the kind that are used for serfs!" ejaculated the Princess, with a shudder. "Now, they are taking off the lids. Heavens! they are already tenanted. Ada, it is your turn to look now."

The Princess resumed her upright position, but Ada Bayard could hear her teeth chattering, and the beat, beat, beat of her terrified heart as well.

Bending down in turn, she placed an eye to the vacated keyhole.

"Tell me, what do *you* see?" gasped the Princess, hysterically.

"They are taking out two awful looking forms, who hardly seem to be quite dead. No, they are *not* dead, for they open their eyes and roll them. They are women, and one has long black hair, like yours, and the other quite light, golden hair, like mine. Their faces — oh, they are so terrible to look at; they seem hardly human — their own mothers wouldn't know the poor creatures, for they are swollen and covered with frightful ulcerations, and look as though flour had been sprinkled over them."

"Oh, God! they must be dying of the floury typhus," moaned the Princess.

"The policemen are all drinking some bright, blue coloured spirit out of bottles now."

"That is to nerve them for some dreadful task. Oh, Ada, dear, don't faint or scream, whatever you see them do. If they don't discover us for another ten minutes assistance may arrive; friends, Ada, and one more in number than our foes."

"Fear not for me, your highness," replied the kneeling English girl. "Now they take the poor, dying woman with the black hair out of her coffin and place her in your bed, and now they lift out the one with my coloured hair and bear her into the adjoining room and put her in my bed. I can see it all clearly through the half-open door. Now they are wiping their hands on the skirts of their long, rough coats, and they are now drinking the blue spirit again."

"Ada," moaned the Princess, dropping on her knees beside her companion, "I can guess the meaning of this terrible scene that you have described to me. Those poor, loathsome looking creatures whom they have laid in our beds are to represent *us*, and we are to be put in those coffins in their stead and carried away to the common plague-pit in the great cemetery, wherein we shall be shot like so much rubbish—alive, perhaps, Ada, alive!"

"Oh, do not imagine anything so horrible," sobbed our heroine. "No man born of woman could have the heart to serve two girls so. I will not believe it. Hark, I can hear the poor wretch who lies in your bed moaning. How near to her they have stuck that hideous black coffin lid with the holes in it."

"*Holes in it?*" gasped the Princess. "Then my worst fears are confirmed. We are to be buried alive. Those holes are for us to breathe through, as long as we may."

"Your highness, pray be pacified, for it cannot, it will not be so. What has either of us done to deserve so cruel a fate? You make your countrymen out to be perfect demons."

"He who rules them is one, at all events, and his slaves, the police, have to obey him or perish."

Both girls were now fain to hold their breath, for they heard the men crossing the room again, evidently in the direction of the cupboard wherein they were concealed.

"Ada, do you know how to pray?" wailed the Princess.

They had not sufficient courage left to peer again through the key-hole, but continued to kneel, with their beautiful arms interlaced, in a perfect agony of terror.

Suddenly the handle of the cupboard door was tried, and directly it was found to be locked, a harsh voice called out, "Open!"

"Hush!" whispered the Princess to Ada, "every instant may be of vital importance to us. Friends must be already hurrying to our rescue."

"Oh," whispered back Ada, "they will hear the beating of our hearts."

There was no second demand for admission made.

Blows instead began to thunder against the frail partition, and soon shivered fragments of wood commenced to fall upon and around the crouching, horror stricken girls.

Presently the entire door gave way —their foes rushed in upon them, great coarse hands smote and tightly gripped their arms and shoulders.

They were torn apart, hurled rather than pushed into the bedroom (which was already tainted and infectious from the dying typhus patients), wrestled with, dashed down on the floor, bruised, breathless, and panting, and then their arms were forced down by their sides and bound round and round thereagainst with strips torn off the skirts of their dresses. Their ankles were next treated in like manner, and then the police rested awhile from their labours, and calmly regarded their writhing victims whilst the vodki bottles were passed round once more.

"Have a drop?" exclaimed one ruffian as he knelt down between the two girls. "You'll want all the Dutch courage that it'll give you, presently."

"Oh, what are you going to do with us?" asked the Princess. "How have we deserved this treatment at your hands? We have never wronged or injured you. Oh! look how you have bruised us in your brutal roughness!"

"It will make you all the tenderer for the worms," retorted the cold blooded villain, with a laugh. "Now, comrades," he added, "let us pack the dolls away in their boxes. Bear a hand. Remember that his highness is as impatient as the devil, and that we were instructed to lose no time about this little job."

"All right, Peter. But hark how the Cossacks are at work. By St. Alexander Newsky, they've unearthed those accursed Nihilists at last."

This retort and the sound of a distant volley of musketry informed the unhappy Princess that her last hope had failed her — that Ivan Reyloff and his companions had as much as they could do to defend *themselves*, without troubling about *her* safety or her rescue.

Another instant and both girls were laid hold of by their shoulders and their feet, and, notwithstanding their shrieks and struggles, shoved into the coffins which a few minutes previously had held the typhus stricken patients. Then some of the police held them whilst others went and fetched the lids to screw down atop of them.

Ada yielded to her fate without a moan—she was, instead, engaged in prayer—but the Princess struggled so violently in the madness of her despair—using both her nails and teeth, that the police called their great coarse fists into play again, and showered blow after blow upon her until her strength was utterly exhausted. Then the lid was forced down atop of her as she made a feeble effort to raise her head, and for a couple of minutes naught could be heard in that sumptuous bed chamber save the rattling of hammers upon the two coffin lids.

When they had been made secure the twelve policemen raised them on to their shoulders, bore them downstairs, and placed them side by side in an open hearse, of a shape which of late years has become common even in England.

It was dispatched with a driver and a single policeman upon the box, the rest remaining to hoist a huge black flag on to the roof of the palace, to lock all the doors save

one, and put great seals upon them, stamped with the arms of the Imperial Chancelerie, to light bonfires around the edifice, so that the contagion should not spread beyond it, to fix a sentry (to be relieved every four hours) at the one door left open, with a caution to admit no one but a certificated agent of the police, or its surgeon, in and out thereat; and this man having been determined on by the casting of lots, the remaining nine went away to report what they had done at the Bureau.

Meanwhile the hearse and its living freight moved slowly through the streets of the capital, uninterfered with by the Cossack and police patrols that now perambulated its every thoroughfare; and leaving St. Petersburgh by the Moscow Road, then proceeded at a more rapid rate in the direction of the great cemetery that is situated close under the grey towers of the celebrated monastery of St. Alexander Newsky.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT THE CEMETERY.

WHAT an awful journey was that for the two imprisoned girls!

Through the holes in their coffin-lids they could now and then see a star, that was all—the slightest movement was utterly impossible, and the wood of their narrow prison-houses was hard as hard could be to their tender frames.

The road, too, was rough and rugged, and the hearse seemed to be entirely destitute of springs.

Still, what were all these minor discomforts to the thought that they were about to be buried alive—to be thrown into some charnel-pit, along with, perhaps, scores of victims of the terrible famine fever (for the floury-typhus is, in truth, nothing else), there to perish slowly amidst the most awful and revolting of surroundings?

Perhaps the fever itself might struggle with hunger, cold, and insufficient air, to carry them off; for were they not lying in the very coffins wherein two poor dying wretches, in the very last stage of that complaint, had been borne all the way from some lazar-house to be laid in their beds?

Catching the contagion under such circumstances was almost certain.

They could hold no converse with each other, for although they were laid side by side, neither could make out what the other said; and at the third futile attempt to hold communication, a hammering on their coffin lids warned them to be silent, though it was a wonder that the policeman on the box could have heard the feeble sounds they made above the jolting and rumbling of the lugubrious vehicle which now bore them so swiftly along.

At length the wailing and soughing of wind tossed tree branches was audible overhead, and now and then a mass of dark sombre pine foliage could be seen to wave between them and the stars, like vast sable plumes.

A little while longer and the vehicle came to a sudden stop.

They heard the driver and his companion spring off the front seat, and then the sound of a door opening, and many feet tramping forth.

Presently they felt themselves lifted out of the hearse and borne along upon men's shoulders.

Perhaps that was the moment when their horror and terror culminated.

Each, indeed, expected to be in a minute or two gently lowered or violently launched into a horrid hole or pit, where, perhaps, some dreadful gas would poison them out of life in a very few minutes.

Their surprise, and, perhaps, their relief also, was intense when, very shortly, the holes in the coffin-lids permitted them to see a red glare around them, and hardly had they realized this fact when they felt that they were laid down on something hard, and then hammers went to work, and presently the coffin-lids were lifted off, and a flood

of light rushed in upon them, nearly blinding them.

They felt themselves lifted out of the coffins and placed to sit down on something, and then, when they *did* recover the full use of their sight, they found themselves in a gloomy chapel, the walls of grey granite, the enormous beams that supported the roof of pitch black pine, and the altar constructed of gleaming black marble, and surmounted by a gaudily coloured picture of the Penagia.*

But neither priests, choristers, nor altar-servers occupied the chapel now.

Long-coated, spike-helmeted policemen seemed to be its sole denizens.

There is a sudden movement amongst them. They draw themselves more stiffly up, the back of each right hand flies simultaneously to the brass peak of each helmet, as the ring of spurs is heard, and the next instant into the chapel stalks, clad in a horseman's scarlet cloak, a glazed cap, and a pair of high, mud-splashed jack-boots, the tall, stalwart form of the Police Minister.

Icicles hang both from his hair and his heavy drooping moustache, for the night is terribly cold; but his face is ruddy enough, and his eyes as bright as those of a serpent that has drawn back its head to spring.

"Stand up!" shouts someone to the girl prisoners, and because they are too bewildered or terrified to immediately obey, down comes the flat of a sword scabbard upon each of their backs in turn, causing them to shuffle on to their feet, notwithstanding their bonds.

"Prisoners!" exclaimed the harsh, stern voice of the Police Minister. "This is the mortuary chapel of the cemetery of Saint Alexander Newsky, and a mortuary chapel, as you must be well aware, is nothing more or less than the threshold to the tomb. There stand the stone tressles whereon the coffins are placed whilst the mass for the dead is being sung. Behold, *your grave clothes are spread out thereon!*"

The trembling, agonised girls looked in the direction of his outstretched hand, and beheld the clothing that the Prince referred to; but, instead of shrouds and head bandages, they seemed to be heaped up sheepskins.

"What have we done to deserve this, your highness?" wailed forth the Princess; "we are innocent of all crime, ay, even of thought of crime."

"Your assertions go for nothing in the face of convincing and irrefutable evidence to the contrary," replied the Police Minister, sternly. "You, Marie Catherine, lately Princess Olga, are guilty of poisoning your companion's father, at her instigation, in order that she might be able to marry a suitor of whom the old man disapproved. You are furthermore guilty of offering her the shelter of your roof, in order that this abominable marriage might be thereunder consummated, and of making a false report to the police that she had quitted Russia for England, *viâ* Berlin. Lastly, you are guilty of being in league with that odious and atrocious band of conspirators against the government and life of our holy father the Czar, who call themselves Nihilists, ay, even to the extent of receiving them within the walls of your palace not more than two hours ago."

Ada Bayard, on hearing the Princess accused of the murder of her father, fainted dead away at once, but the latter rejoined, fiercely:

"*You* know perfectly well that I am innocent of all these vile and

* Holy Virgin.

trumped-up charges. The Nihilists broke into my palace—I did not invite them there. As for the other crimes, they are solely of your own imagining."

"I have signed evidence that you were the very heart and soul of the revolt, and the direct instigator of a most atrocious and fiendish attempt upon the lives of the Czar, the Czarina, and the whole Imperial Family. I expect that this testimony will be confirmed by many Nihilist prisoners, not but what one count of the indictment would be quite sufficient to consign you to the knout, the branding-irons and Siberia."

"Oh, mercy, mercy!" shrieked the beautiful Princess, falling on her knees. "I will be your abject slave for evermore if you will but have pity on me!"

"A Police Minister has no room for pity in his breast. Duty loads his heart so heavily that it can pulsate to no other emotion. The world has done with you, and you have done with the world."

"No, no, no! say not that. I am not fit to die! I cannot, I dare not!" and the Princess cast herself down upon the damp stone floor, and positively writhed thereon, as though undergoing intense bodily anguish.

"Up with her. All this tomfoolery is wasted upon me," said the Police Minister, sternly; and then once more the hard, grimy hands of a couple of policemen closed on the plump, naked arms of the Princess, their iron grip sinking deep into the soft flesh as they lugged her to her feet again.

"Hark ye, madame," exclaimed Prince Golgorouki then. "There are two kinds of graves in Russia; one is the churchyard mould, with its perishing bodies and its worms, the other is called Siberia."

"Oh, send me to Siberia," screamed the Princess, "anywhere—yes, anywhere where I may have time to repent; and where hell is not yawning wide to devour me."

"Sign, then, this document," said the Prince, drawing from his pocket a sheet of foolscap paper closely written over, but on which the ink appeared to be hardly dry. "Isaac Pilnitz, you have pen and inkhorn. Come forward."

"What is it that you wish me to affix my name to?" asked the eager Princess, as a thin and horrible-looking Jew came forth from the shadow of a pillar, which had hitherto concealed him, all smiles and smirks.

"A confession that you are guilty of the crimes I have just mentioned."

"But I am *not*. You know as well as I do that I am as innocent of them as a child."

"I know exactly the opposite. Come, madame, will you sign?"

"Acknowledge myself a murderess and a traitress? Never!"

"I see that my intended leniency is undeserved. You are wicked enough to commit atrocious crimes, but too proud to confess them. Replace this woman in her coffin, and nail her down."

"Oh, God! are you man or devil? Give me the paper. I will sign *anything* in order to prolong my miserable life for a little while," wailed the Princess.

"Cut her bonds, so that she may use her right hand," said the Prince, curtly; whilst a smile of truly infernal malice and triumph wreathed his thin, cruel lips.

This was at once done, and Isaac Pilnitz, the Police Minister's secretary, stepped mincingly up to the Princess, and handed her a pen dipped in ink.

Then, with a couple of clanking strides, the Prince stood beside her with the confession.

When she had signed it he hissed in her ear—"You failed to obey my commands. You consented to league yourself with felons against me, and you wholly resolved, in order to secure your own and that girl's safety, to betray me to the Czar, and win your joint safety by my ruin. Ha, ha, ha! minion, you have found me more than a match for you."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN UNSEEN LISTENER.

"But not for *me*!" suddenly exclaimed a voice in his rear, and the Police Minister looked round, and beheld, to his mingled horror and dismay, the face of the Emperor Alexander within a few inches of his own.

Its expression informed him that everything which he had just muttered, rather than whispered to the Princess Olga, had been overheard by the last person on earth whom he would have chosen for a listener.

Many years had elapsed since Prince Golgorouki had turned pale at the sight of any man or thing—many years since he had bowed his proud head so low as he did now, ere he rejoined:

"Your Majesty witnesses me carrying out a very painful, yet most necessary duty. That fair woman it was who attempted your august life at the Opera House the other night, and that dark one has conspired with Nihilists against your *throne* as well as your life. She was elected this very night Queen of the Mob, but with a somewhat rough hand I have washed her evil subjects in their own blood, and now the *Black Coach* stands ready outside to convey both criminals as far as Moscow, *en route* to Siberia."

The Emperor listened patiently to what his Police Minister said; but when he had concluded he made answer:

"Oh, miserable intriguer and liar, the man who has for long years been your right hand in every iniquity has this night testified against you. As the head of the uprising which you have just put down (an uprising which he has assured me would never have been dreamed of but for your tyranny), he threw himself on my mercy rather than on your clemency, knowing that having used him thoroughly up, you would welcome so good an opportunity of destroying him. Ivan Reyloff, stand forward and regard your late master and tyrant with a bold face and cleansed conscience!"

At the Czar's command the Nihilist chief and ostensible police agent came forth from out the shadow of one of the squat, dumpy columns of the mortuary chapel, and with the glittering, bead-like black eyes that were set so deep in his white, pasty-looking face, glared with an expression of the most triumphant malice into the horror-filled steel grey ones of his once mighty master.

"Will your Majesty believe the assertions of this treacherous hound, in preference to those of a long tried and faithful servant?" almost whined the Police Minister.

"I would not have done so had he not first proved to me that you had been a most faithless servant, ay, and a most cruel and unscrupulous villain to boot. He has bought his life and liberty, which, I must own, were justly forfeited through his treason, by exerting himself to the

utmost to preserve those two poor trembling girls from a fate infinitely worse than death. He has confessed that 'twas *he* who, by your instructions, fired at me in the Opera House the other night, not with the intention of killing, or even of injuring me, but with the object of saddling the crime on to Miss Bayard's shoulders, and thereby placing her completely in your unscrupulous power. He has also convinced me that you were the murderer of her father; ay, and that you endeavoured to destroy the daughter also, and by the same means, as soon as you discovered that she had become a serious peril and a constant menance to you."

"Lies, your Majesty—the most infernal and malicious lies. Can you really, Sire, look into such a face as that scoundrel possesses, and give credence to a single word he utters?" half stuttered, and half groaned Prince Golgorouki.

"He has shown me something more than his face, for he has taken me all over the Olga Palace, and there pointed out to me the contents of a certain snuff box, and the dead bodies of the two women who were to have personated your two intended victims yonder, and to have been entombed under their names in consecrated ground here, whilst, for your own safety's sake rather than for their pretended crimes, you had buried them alive, but to rot away piecemeal, in the quicksilver mines of distant Samarov."

"The specious rascal has trafficked with your Majesty's known humanity to such an extent as to win his own safety at the cost of *my* destruction."

"Stay, I have not yet told you *all* that I know, Golgorouki, for from the Olga Palace he took me to your own, and there placed in my hands all the papers and documents connected with your scheme for bringing forward a personator of my for long most mysteriously disappeared Uncle Constantine, and setting him up as a pretender to my throne."

"The viper, whom for long years I have warmed in my bosom has stung me to the death," shrieked out the Police Minister, on hearing this last charge, immediately adding —"He must have keys that will open my every lock. But what am I talking about. He forged all those papers, Sire, he forged them all."

"Prince, you have been working with too many irons in the fire at once. This last one has burnt you badly. You meant to send those two girls to Siberia, but I have decided that a convent for a future home will be ample reparation for one of them, and that, the other being absolutely sinless and faultless, shall be married to the man she loves. As, however, the *Black Coach* is waiting outside for someone to ride in it, and a sheepskin suit lies yonder for someone to put on, you, Vanko Golgorouki, Prince and Minister no longer, shall clothe yourself in the one and journey in the other. Yes, within the passing hour you will be on your road to Siberia (your destination the iron mines of Katshuku, for life), and another Police Minister will rule at St. Petersburg in your stead. Now, not a word more in your defence, or you shall be branded on either cheek with the letters V. O. R.* in addition."

But Golgorouki could not have uttered another word had he tried ever so hard, for the erst man of iron had suddenly changed, as it were, into a man of putty, with hardly sufficient strength left to stand on his feet.

"You had my poor old father

* Felon.

knouted to death—for years I have resolved that one day you should know that I was his son, but not until I could crush you like a worm under my heel!" hissed Ivan Reyloff in the doomed Prince's ear, as he passed him close by; but the erst blustering tyrant had not now sufficient spirit to make him any answer.

Meanwhile, the Czar had taken a little note book out of his pocket, and, turning over some of the pages, he presently read out, "'Gubernium of Katshuku, Class C, No. 445.'"

"Prisoner," he continued, sternly, as he turned once more towards his late minister, "you have forfeited your name, as do all who are sent to Siberia. You will henceforth be a mere numeral, and whenever addressed as that numeral by any person in authority, you must humbly respond thereto. It will be painted, as usual, on the breast of your sheepskin, so that everyone will know what to call you. Now, my men, divest your prisoner of his stars, orders, and medals, deprive him of his uniform, and put on his livery of disgrace. I will stay and see it done."

The police officials, who had so lately been his abject and cringing slaves, at once took their late chief in hand, who looked more like a limp and flaccid corpse than a living man as they did by him as the Czar had commanded them.

The sheepskin clothing, which would have fitted one of the girls baglike and loose, as it was intended to do, could hardly be made to meet over his stalwart form, and was, moreover, so short as to cause him to look supremely ridiculous; a by no means light extra punishment to a man of his pride.

Lastly, a potful of black paint was brought forward, a brush was dipped therein, and on the breast of his sheepskin suit (whose woolly side was worn inwards) was painted, in rough, bold characters—

G. K.—C.
445.

This denoted his destination, his grade or class and his number.

Prince Golgorouki was no more; he had changed into three figures.

Lastly, a sheepskin mask was handed to him. The Emperor sternly commanded him to put it on.

For a moment the doomed wretch hesitated, gazed at his Imperial Master appealingly, and touched his lips with his forefinger, thus mutely asking for permission to speak.

"No," said the Czar, "I will never listen to your voice again. You will open your mouth at the cost of the branding-irons, which you have ordered to be used on so many hundreds of miserable wretches, all of them far less deserving of the agony of the red-hot iron, and its indelible mark of disgrace than you have proved *yourself* to be. Cover your face from the sight of the kind master whom you schemed to betray, and who even now is perhaps more merciful to you than he should be, and go your way. May it lead you to repentance, and eventually to peace. Ah, you would still plead? then away with him, men!—away with him, for the very sight of him sickens me."

So saying, the Czar made a motion with his hand and turned his head aside.

His wishes were immediately understood, for half a dozen policemen sprang forward, and compelled their late chief to don his foul and greasy sheepskin mask; next they put on him a heavy set of ankle and wrist fetters, and lastly the doors of the mortuary chapel were rolled open, and there, standing close outside

them, and just in front of the Czar's silver sleigh and sweat-reeking horses, whose condition bore witness to the speed at which they had been driven to the two girls' rescue, stood a vehicle, in appearance very closely resembling an English prison van.

It had no windows, stood on iron runners instead of wheels, was as black as the ace of spades, and was harnessed to a pair of horses of an equally sable hue.

The convict was then marched out of the chapel, between policemen, the door of the Black Coach was opened, he was pushed into it without ceremony, and chained to an iron pillar in its centre.

Then the door was slammed shut and securely locked, the driver and a policeman mounted on to the box, and, at a signal from the Czar, the former whipped up his cattle and urged them at a gallop in the direction of far away Moscow.

There the inmate of the Black Coach would leave it for the ordinary chain-gang, and perform the rest of the two thousand three hundred miles' journey to Northern Siberia on foot, in company with many hundreds of other equally hopeless and despairing wretches.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FALL OF THE CURTAIN.

THE reader will perhaps think it strange that all this while the Czar had made no attempt to comfort the Princess Olga and Ada Bayard, but the fact was that there had been no occasion for his doing so, inasmuch as both girls had fainted away in each other's arms on discovering that they were saved, and had been unconscious ever since.

Now, however, that the ex-Police Minister had been started off on his journey into life-long exile, the Emperor ordered the immediate removal of the Princess to a convent that stood near at hand, and wherein he had resolved that she should end her days, happened they to be few or many.

She was covered up warm, and conveyed thither on a wooden sledge, drawn by the police, still in an unconscious condition.

The Emperor would not allow so much as an attempt to be made to bring Ada Bayard round until the Princess was gone, for he thought it best that she should never look upon her false friend's face again; but directly the latter had departed he had the English girl carried out of the dismal mortuary chapel and placed in his sleigh, and after, with his own hands, wrapping her up in costly furs, he sprang into the vehicle beside her, and commanded his ischvostchick to return to St. Petersburg with all speed, so that, a moment later, the three horses, driven abreast, were almost flying over the hard frozen and dazzlingly white snow.

Ada did not fully recover her reason until the metropolis was reached, and she was set down at the door of a neat little house, where, waiting to receive her, was the faithful Baba.

The Czar had managed it so, for Ivan Reyloff had told him where the poor woman was imprisoned, and also where a furnished cottage could be hired almost on the instant.

The next morning Sir Harry Gordon, summoned to the Winter Palace and informed by the good Emperor of everything that had happened the night before, called on Ada, and found her, to his joy (for he had begun to doubt the possibility of such a thing), in the full possession of her reason.

The reader need scarcely be informed that the interview was a long one, and that, during it, the *attaché* won the lovely girl's consent to immediately become his wife.

Why need we drag out our narrative to any greater length?

The wedding was celebrated by the chaplain of the British Embassy three days later, and within the passing week bride and bridegroom set sail for Scotland, Baba going also, as Ada's personal attendant, though treated by her more as though she had been her mother. It was a very certain matter that nothing in life would ever again part those two.

Sir Harry and Lady Gordon are,

we believe, still living at the ancestral seat of the former in the remote Western Highlands of Scotland, Baba with them, and now more Scotch than ever she was Russian.

The Princess Olga, as plain Sister Catherine, is, or at all events, very lately was, a prematurely old looking Nun in the Convent of the Assumption, nigh unto St. Petersburg.

For the first six years of her residence therein she was a raving lunatic, consequent upon what she had undergone at the hands of the ruffianly Police Minister, but the loving care of the gentle sisterhood at last completely restored to her her reason, and also embued her with deep penitence for all the crimes and follies of which she had been guilty.

As for the prompter of her deeper sins, there is no telling whether he is alive or dead, for though there is a No. 445 still labouring, day by day, in the comparatively healthy iron mines of Kalshuku, the numeral may be worn by quite a different individual, for there a prisoner never looks upon a fellow prisoner's face.

Ivan Reyloff was forgiven by the Czar, and even promoted to a higher position in the Police than the one which he had previously held: but a month later he was assassinated at night in the streets by three men who had been his fellow Nihilist conspirators, and who believed, though erroneously, that he had been a traitor to their cause.

The fate of the good Emperor Alexander is recorded in history. He was made a martyr to the iniquities of a system which he was powerless to change, that Bureaucracy which is the real ruling power in Russia, whilst the Czar, whoever he may at the time be, is only its puppet, a Bureaucracy which rears its hideous head omnipotent above the very throne, whilst almost hidden by the throne, so that the faults of corrupt Ministers are attributed by the populace to the Sovereign; whence springs that Nihilism of which the world has already heard so much, and is, we much fear, destined in the near future to hear yet more.

THE END.

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